

The Biological Imagination in Twentieth-Century Jewish American Culture

by

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
List of Figures	vi
Abstract	vii
Chapter 1 Introduction: No Systematic Study of Any Branch of Science.....	1
Critical Context	5
Race in the Twentieth Century: Historical and Science Historical Background	10
Dissertation's Trajectory	16
Outline of Chapters	17
Chapter 2 "The Promised Land of Evolution:" The Role of Evolutionary Thought in Early 20 th - Century Jewish American Immigrant Narratives	20
Tensions in Scale and the Biological Imagination	21
<i>David Levinsky</i> : A Satire of Social Darwinism.....	27
The Mock Autobiography	32
Darwinism and Narrative	34
<i>The Promised Land</i> and Programmatic Change.....	41
Darwinist Approaches to Jewish History	47
Slanted Readings and Soft Inheritance.....	50
Biological Americanization.....	54
Ethnographic Detail in the Autobiographical Narrative	57
Chapter 3 "A Type That Produces": Seeing Through Time in Jewish Photographic Types	60
Placing the "Type" in the History of 19 th -Century Scientific Images.....	64
Photography, Visuality, and Race	68
Galton and Jacobs: Creating Composite Photographic Types	73
Constructing a Jewish Gaze	79
Photographic Types in and Around Literature	83
Typology Against Urban Chaos.....	90
Photographic Counter-Discourses to Typology	94
Looking to Fictional Types, Looking Ahead	103

Chapter 4 “Mestn mit durkhdringlekhe oygn”/Measuring with Penetrating Eyes: Contesting Typological Sight in 1940s Jewish American Fiction	107
America’s Penetrating Gaze.....	114
The Family Saga, with a Difference.....	117
Narrating the Typological Process	122
The Crisis of Typology and Biology	127
<i>Focus</i> and America’s Jewish Typology	131
Making a Gentleman’s Agreement	144
Re-framing Jewish Difference	145
Re-Disciplining the Biological Imagination	150
Conclusion.....	156
Chapter 5 “Strange Creatures Who Must Grow Gills:” Between Queer and Heritable Models of Contemporary Yiddish Language and Culture”	161
Queer Yiddish: Defining a Field	166
A Few Words on Biological Imagination in Queer Yiddish Art.....	173
Heritable Yiddish: Just Relax.....	184
“The Most Jewish Show on Television”	193
Chapter 6 Conclusion: “Stored in the Genetic Code:” Biological Imagination Today	205
The Project Thus Far	208
Theories and Practices of Diaspora	210
Adrienne Rich’s Dream of a Common Project	214
A Brief Counterexample	222
Genetic Metaphor and Text.....	225
Coda	226
Bibliography	227

List of Figures

Figure 1 Francis Galton, Composite Portrait of the “Jewish Type,” 1885	74
Figure 2 First Page of McClure’s Article, “Jewish Invasion of American,” April 1913.....	85
Figure 3 Image of Census Bureau Worker from McClures, April 1913	88
Figure 4 Image of Hungarian Jewish Girl From McClure’s, April 1913	89
Figure 5 “Portrait Studies of Jewish Women,” New York City, July 4, 1926 (Center for Jewish History Archive)	99
Figure 6 Graphic from Davka publication of Klepfisz's poem, 1997. (University of Michigan Library Special Collections)	162
Figure 7 Cover of Davka, Winter 1997. (University of Michigan Library Special Collections)	163

Abstract

This dissertation introduces the concept of biological imagination, a new analytic framework for Jewish literary and cultural production in the United States. *The Biological Imagination in Twentieth-Century Jewish American Culture* argues that from the turn of the twentieth century to the present, Jewish American authors across genres repeatedly turn to themes and forms of biology—ranging from evolution to racial typology, to genetics—in order to locate Jewish inheritance in the body. While biological knowledge itself has been approached with understandable wariness since the Holocaust, due to its association with the race science that fueled the Nazi genocide, the dissertation illustrates that both in spite of, and because of, Jews' vexed historical relationship to biology, Jewish American authors continue to infuse their works with biological knowledge after the historical chasm of 1945. That Jewish literary and cultural production should continue to incorporate, or obsess over, biological theories of inheritance, complicates the historical narrative of Jews in the United States as well as the way that Jewish American literature can be understood within American ethnic literature today.

The biological imagination necessitates reexamination of the literary and cultural circulation of many of Jewish American culture's central concerns, including language, immigration and assimilation, race and ethnicity, and gender and sexuality. Not only does biological knowledge enrapture fictional characters, but biological models of inheritance also deeply structure works' narrative and poetic forms. Furthermore, this cultural phenomenon extends beyond literature, from photography in the 1910s, to contemporary television series. The dissertation assembles sources in English and in Yiddish, from the 1890s to the present,

including *The Rise of David Levinsky* by Abraham Cahan, *The Promised Land* by Mary Antin, *The Family Carnovsky* by Israel Joshua Singer, *Focus* by Arthur Miller, *Gentleman's Agreement* by Laura Z. Hobson, *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue* by Irena Klepfisz, *Sources* by Adrienne Rich, and *Portnoy's Complaint* by Philip Roth, as well as the composite photography of Francis Galton and the Amazon series *Transparent*. More often evoking mystery than certainty, the biological imagination at once responds to and highlights the elusiveness of Jewish inheritance for Jewish authors in the United States.

Chapter 1 Introduction: No Systematic Study of Any Branch of Science

*“I made no systematic study of any branch of science...For what enthralled my imagination in the whole subject of natural history was not the orderly array of facts, but the glimpse I caught, through this or that fragment of science, of the grand principles underlying the facts” — Mary Antin, *The Promised Land*¹*

Mary Antin’s 1912 autobiography, *The Promised Land*, is named not as a reference to the biblical land of Israel, but to her adopted nation, the United States. Remarkably, the author comes across yet another “promised land” toward the end of the book: Darwin’s theory of evolution. When this revelation arrives, the author writes, “...the high peaks of the promised land of evolution did flash on my vision in the earlier days, and with these to guide me I rebuilt the world, and found it much nobler than it had ever been before, and took great comfort in it.”² Antin learns about Darwin in a club for natural history hobbyists, organized by a settlement house that had served her and her immigrant family in Boston. The club takes her on excursions to the nature beyond Boston’s city limits, and she attends lectures, all of which reveal to her the “kaleidoscopic bits of stupendous panorama which is painted in the literature of Darwinism.”³ While critics of Antin’s text have long commented on the implications of her bestowing the United States with the title of “promised land,” they have only just begun to address what it means for the theory of evolution to receive this distinction as well.⁴

¹ Mary Antin, *The Promised Land*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: Penguin Classics, 2012), 258.

² Antin, 262.

³ Antin, 258.

⁴ See for instance Sarah Wilson, “The Evolution of Ethnicity,” *ELH* 76, no. 1 (2009): 247–76, <https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.0.0032>; Lori Jirousek, “Mary Antin’s Progressive Science: Eugenics, Evolution, and the Environment,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 27, no. 1 (2008): 58.

What is perhaps most significant about this intellectual turn is that Antin so enthusiastically, so unequivocally embraces biological knowledge, even if she may at times disregard its specific details (as is evident in the epigraph above). She seems to find in biological knowledge both clarity and mystery and equates it to the revelatory longing of seeing the holy land that one has not yet entered. As I show in the first chapter of this dissertation, the manner in which Antin incorporates Darwin's theory of gradual change over millennia might generate narrative contradictions with the general political message of her autobiography, which was published amid the immigration debates of the early twentieth century and has long been understood as a straightforward account that flaunts the speed and ease of her assimilation to American life. Nevertheless, I also take seriously her proclamation that biological knowledge is for her a holy land, with high peaks that ennoble her entire world.

This dissertation illustrates how biology would continue to enrapture Jewish authors in the United States in the century to follow. I will grant that from the standpoint of the twenty-first century critic, simply placing the words "Jewish" and "biology" together, for some, amounts to an essentialist red flag. Indeed, such a wariness has prevailed in much of post-Holocaust Jewish culture, and in American culture as well, with strong associations to eugenics, to deterministic notions of race and ethnicity, and perhaps most prominently in this context, to the Nazi genocide of Jews in World War II. In scholarly discourse, biological knowledge is less often regarded with the great promise that Antin found in it, and more often associated with immense pain. While significant historical research has looked at the relationship between Jews and biology, from medicine to racial thought, from the nineteenth century leading up to the Holocaust, little scholarship exists about what of these cultural and intellectual trends have carried over that historical chasm.

From the early twentieth century to the early twenty-first century, Jewish American authors have continued to infuse their works with themes and forms of biology—specifically those related to biological theories of inheritance—both in spite of and because of Jews’ vexed historical relationship to biology. This phenomenon, which I call biological imagination, has been heretofore unremarked on by scholars as a sustained current of Jewish American literature. It encompasses literary and cultural projects that are inspired by biology’s narrative potential, or those committed to dramatizing its political dangers. Authors’ biological imaginations have been guided (though not necessarily determined) by prevailing biological paradigms—from evolution, to eugenics and racial typology, to genetics—throughout the century. Just as the forms of literary engagements with biological theories—as well as their artistic or rhetorical effects—change over time, intersecting historical and science-historical contexts illuminate that this story is neither linear nor uniform.

For instance, an unintentional echo to Antin’s “promised land of evolution” can be found in Adrienne Rich’s 1983 poetic cycle, *Sources*, in which the poet probes at her relationship to Jewish history, the Holocaust, the land of Israel, and the United States. Describing her felt connection to Jewish women of previous generations who sailed in different directions from her own ancestors, she writes:

“They say such things are stored
In the genetic code —

Half-chances, unresolved
Possibilities, the life

Passed on because unlived —
A mystic biology? —”⁵

⁵ Adrienne Rich, *Sources* (Woodside: The Heyeck Press, 1983), 28.

What is this mystic biology of Rich's? What is this promised land of Antin's? For now, we can at the very least note that while Antin portrays biology through the language of Jewish tradition, Rich describes a Jewish inheritance as biological. In each chapter of this dissertation, the biological imagination responds to—and in fact highlights—the elusiveness of Jewish inheritance for Jewish authors in the United States. To this effect, the biological imagination marks a phenomenon in which authors locate a Jewish inheritance in the body, rather than in intellectual, religious, or textual traditions. Biological knowledge thus renders the body itself as a site marked by Jewish history, language, or practice (extending beyond the most commonly acknowledged practice of circumcision, which only applies to the male body).

Conceiving of Jewish inheritance as bodily, through biological forms, renders it imaginatively manipulable beyond formal biological knowledge—such as when a non-Jewish character in Laura Z. Hobson's novel, *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) imagines that his body has mutated in response to antisemitism. He believes, "A mutation had been produced in the bunched nerves, in the eardrums that caught nuance, in the very corneas that gave him sight" (119). Or, in the phenomenon's contemporary iterations beyond literature (from contemporary television to podcasts), American Jews troubled by the idea that they do not speak Yiddish and that the language is being "diluted," imagine that the language in some way lives in them and is passed along genetically.⁶ Not merely the realm of fantastical laymen, this sort of language surfaces in Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi's 2018 tribute to the Hebrew poet and translator Chana Bloch when she writes, "...we women with English on our tongues, Yiddish in our DNA, and Hebrew in our

⁶ Hillary Frank, "When Mom Says Oy! And Dad Says ¡Ay!," *The Longest Shortest Time*, n.d., <https://longestshortesttime.com/episode-124-when-mom-says-oy-and-dad-says-ay/>. At one point in this episode, the guest, Rebecca Lehrer, says, "But maybe...we absorbed it, and it's sort of like in our DNA now..."

heart...”⁷ The biological imagination more often evokes mystery than certainty, yet it can teach us much about how Jewish authors in the United States conceive of Jewish inheritance.

Critical Context

It should perhaps go without saying—yet I cannot pass up the opportunity to make this explicit—that this dissertation is extremely wary of biological determinism. Rejecting any sweeping celebration of biological theories of inheritance, I offer instead curiosity about the forms of literary and artistic production that have been shaped by authors’ engagement with such theories. If anything, this dissertation is a supplication that we simply *not look away from them*. Reading—indeed, reading generously—these literary texts through the lens of the biological theories that they put forward, and alongside the popular scientific discourses of their moments, is to me at once an important historicization and an important ethical project. This is not a project of recuperating texts or scientific theories that by now have been left by the wayside, but rather a project of acknowledging how and why it is that some biological ideas seem dangerous to us today. And given this, we also ought to seriously consider how to treat literary works that attest to past scientific ideas’ imaginative hold on artists and authors of various stripes.

I am sympathetic to the tendency in Jewish American literary studies, as in the field of American ethnic literary studies more broadly, to regard biology with decided skepticism. Specifically, when the word “biology” appears in this scholarship, it is most often posed as regressive current against which to gain critical traction.⁸ Such dismissal is on display in Benjamin Schreier’s sweeping critique of the field of Jewish American literary studies; for him,

⁷ Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, “The Roads Taken,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 36, no. 2 (August 7, 2018): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sho.2018.0018>.

⁸ When biological thought has been considered as a generative current within Jewish American literature, it has been regarded most seriously as a talisman of modernity. See, for instance, Wilson, “The Evolution of Ethnicity.”

a “biologistic”—that is, essentialist, naturalized, and static—definition of Jewish identity as a literary hermeneutic marks intellectual laziness, and serves as an obstruction of theorization, imagination, and critique.⁹ Likewise, Zohar Weiman-Kelman aligns biology with heteronormativity and historical determinism.¹⁰ In the study of American ethnic literature more generally, as early as the 1980s Werner Sollors famously proposed the model of “descent” plus “consent” so as to turn away from “...grounding close readings of text on static notions of descent, and on primordial, organicist, sometimes even biological—but in all cases largely unquestioned—concepts of ethnic group membership.”¹¹ The stakes for Sollors are not only analytical, but ethical and political: illustrating how the very same American culture that proposes a consent-based melting-pot ideology has also propagated cruel descent-based programs such as Jim Crow laws, segregation, and racialized limitations on immigration. Indeed, how can we not regard “biology” qua “descent” with hesitation, Sollors challenges us, when for many marginalized groups in the United States, the opportunity to consent (or not) to an ethnicity is a privilege not always granted?

My own answer to this quandary is that the ethical imperative that these scholars point out can hold true, even as we probe the dissemination of biological knowledge in American culture, in search of nuance. In this regard, I follow scholars such as Britt Russert and Shawn Michelle Smith, who have explored ways that African American intellectuals made use of the

⁹ Benjamin Schreier, *The Impossible Jew: Identity and the Reconstruction of Jewish American Literary History* (New York ; London: NYU Press, 2015), 19; Schreier’s term “biologistic” is similar to what Cynthia Ozick has called “biographical” or “parochial” definitions of Jewish literature, meaning a practice of categorizing any text as “Jewish,” so long as it was composed by an author also easily categorized as Jewish. Cynthia Ozick, “Toward a New Yiddish,” in *Art & Ardor: Essays* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984), 153.

¹⁰ Zohar Weiman-Kelman, *Queer Expectations : A Genealogy of Jewish Women’s Poetry* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018), xii.

¹¹ Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*, xiii, 294 p. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 11, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

theories and methods of race science in order to argue against slavery and racism in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.¹² This is a “critical tradition” that Nancy Leys Stepan and Sander Gilman have also marked, arguing that those targeted socially by the scientific theories of their moment tend to adopt a scientific idiom in order to dispel such stereotyping or targeting—precisely because the authority of science often requires them to do so.¹³ Scholarly studies such as these point out that just as biological paradigms change over time, the meaning of biology for literary authors and cultural producers is also historically specific. When biological knowledge is itself central to the object of study, it can be seen as contingent, and “biology” need not serve as shorthand for uncritical notions of ethnic identities.

Within Jewish studies, a significant corpus of scholarship has emerged in recent decades about the scientific construction of the Jewish body, particularly in Europe. These rich studies of British and German race science, Jewish responses to evolutionary theory, and the role of Jews as practitioners and subjects of medicine up until the 1930s are the ground upon which I build my own arguments. My work is especially indebted to scholars such as Mitchell B. Hart, John Efron, and Sander Gilman, who have shown with great nuance the ways in which non-Jews and Jews alike have turned to biology to make meaning of Jewishness. Since the 1990s, the corporeal turn in Jewish studies has made space for the exploration of what constitutes a body as Jewish, and the various modes of knowledge that make the very idea of a “Jewish body” possible.

¹² Britt Rusert, *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2017); Shawn Michelle Smith, “‘Looking at One’s Self through the Eyes of Others’: W.E.B. Du Bois’s Photographs for the 1900 Paris Exposition,” *African American Review* 34, no. 4 (2000): 581, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2901420>.

¹³ Nancy Leys Stepan and Sander L. Gilman, “Appropriating the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism,” in *The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance*, ed. Dominick LaCapra (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 82–83.

In this dissertation I argue that we can use the sensibility of Jewish body studies to expand the definitional bounds of “Jewish texts.” Over a decade ago, Jewish body scholars from across disciplines overwhelmingly responded to the criticism that their field spuriously de-centers Jewish texts (labeled the “text-body” problem, which approximated a “mind-body” problem), by assuring that texts and textuality are still at the heart of their scholarly enterprise—for instance, that studies look at how the Jewish body is constructed within Jewish religious and cultural canons, from the Mishnah to S.Y. Abramovitch’s *The Travels of Benjamin the Third* (1878) to Isaac Bashevis Singer’s “Yentl the Yeshivah Boy.”¹⁴ This response, while true, does not fully acknowledge the potential intervention of studying the imbrication of Jewish bodies and texts. Beyond insisting on the imbrication of text and body, I offer that this insight necessarily causes us to identify and understand Jewish literature differently.

Take, for example, Mary Antin, whose experience of keeping kosher caused an internal cry when she attempted to eat pork, or Maurice Fishberg and Israel Zangwill who wrote that they could see the mark of Jewish suffering on the faces of Jewish individuals, or contemporary figures who posit that they carry Yiddish in their DNA. In each of these cases, Jewish traditions, languages, and histories are by no means irrelevant. However, the authors telegraph their investment in Jewish tradition through the body, and specifically through biology, rather than through forms of intertextuality more traditionally sought out in studies of modern Jewish literature.

¹⁴ A 2005 symposium in *Jewish Quarterly Review* addressed this issue from the perspectives of multiple disciplines. The symposium introduction and several contributions are cited here. David N. Myers, “Introduction: Reflections on the Discourse of the Body in Jewish Studies,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, no. 3 (2005): v–vi; Daniel Boyarin, “Response to Leon Wieseltier,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, no. 3 (2005): 443–46; Sharon Gillerman, “More than Skin Deep: Histories of the Modern Jewish Body,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, no. 3 (2005): 470–78; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “The Corporeal Turn,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, no. 3 (2005): 447–61.

Perhaps the most telling example would be to the titular character David Levinsky from Abraham Cahan's novel, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, whose body could never release itself from his yeshivah hand gestures. Where other works of modern Jewish literature might use copious textual allusions to signal the characters' deep knowledge of Jewish texts, it is David's "yeshivah gesticulations" that index the character's entanglement with Jewish textual traditions. At the time of the novel's publication, gestures, posture, and mannerisms were all central points of observation in the quest to understand Jewish biological inheritance. It is true that Cahan already serves for many as a key figure in the history of Jewish American literature (especially literature written in English by members of the era of mass immigration). However, by reading for the ways that Cahan writes about the body, and about biology, we can set off on new trajectories for reading Jewish American literature. These new paths could entail looking to the photographic representations of "Jewish types" published alongside the initial serialization of *David Levinsky* in *McClure's* magazine (as I do in the third chapter of this dissertation), and investigating the role of photographic racial typology in a transnational Jewish culture more broadly.

If this argument aims to reconcile the text-body problem (or at least come down on one side of it), it also provides new avenues for a problem that seems always to plague Jewish American literature in general. Like other modern Jewish literatures not written in historic Jewish languages, there seems always an impossible task to define what a "Jewish text" is. By reading for the biological imagination, this dissertation expands the definition of a "Jewish text"—especially for those written in languages not typically counted as "Jewish languages." I argue that this does not amount to a thinning of Jewish textual tradition, but a need to recalibrate the analytic frameworks that allow us to recognize and read Jewish literature. This dissertation is—at times implicitly or explicitly—a rebuke of the perpetual handwringing inside and outside

the academy about the ultimate hollowness or inevitable demise of Jewish American literature.¹⁵ It is also an attempt to circumvent gate keeping and canon adjudicating in favor of a more open study of these works.

Race in the Twentieth Century: Historical and Science Historical Background

This dissertation's case studies span across more than a hundred years: from the early twentieth century to the early twenty-first century. Within this historical time frame, race became a contested concept in biological and popular scientific discourses of inheritance, as scholars in the burgeoning interdisciplinary field of Science Technology and Society (STS) studies have comprehensively recorded.¹⁶ Jews are often only implicitly a part of this story, and they do admittedly fit slightly askew within it. Jews are both the population whose state-sanctioned racial victimization in the Holocaust caused the scientific community to turn against the concept of race at mid-century, and a population that is no longer considered to be a race in a contemporary American culture still very much shaped by racial distinctions. Insofar as Jews—particularly Ashkenazi Jews, meaning those of Eastern European descent—are understood to be far less vulnerable to racism than many others in the United States, the scholarly neglect of their relationship to race science and biology since 1945 might reasonably seem like a less than urgent lacuna to fill. However, it remains a critical lack, which has become especially salient as Jews

¹⁵ Irving Howe, "Introduction," in *Jewish-American Stories* (New York: Signet, 1977), 1–17; William Deresiewicz, "The Imaginary Jew," May 10, 2007, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/imaginary-jew/>; David Bezmozgis, "The End of American Jewish Literature, Again," *Tablet Magazine*, September 17, 2014, [/sections/arts-letters/articles/bezmozgis-american-jewish-literature](https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/bezmozgis-american-jewish-literature).

¹⁶ Troy Duster, *Backdoor to Eugenics*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2003); Duana Fullwiley, "The Biological Construction of Race: 'Admixture' Technology and the New Genetic Medicine," *Social Studies of Science* 38, no. 5 (October 2008): 695–735, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306312708090796>; Ann Morning, "Does Genomics Challenge the Social Construction of Race?," *Sociological Theory* 32, no. 3 (2014): 189–207; W. Carson Byrd et al., "Biological Determinism and Racial Essentialism: The Ideological Double Helix of Racial Inequality," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 661, no. 1 (September 1, 2015): 8–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716215591476>.

have been among those increasingly targeted by rising white supremacy in the United States—a movement whose definition of Jews is indeed biologically articulated.¹⁷

This dissertation argues that the twentieth century did not witness a linear progression of cultural attitudes and scientific norms around a biological Jewishness. As earlier chapters attest, Jews were discussed in American culture as a “race” at the turn of the century. Even as Jews’ status as a distinct, “pure race” was contested as early as the late nineteenth century, their racial designation remained a legitimate (albeit unanswered) scientific question for decades to follow. In the earlier decades of the twentieth century, Jews, as well as other “white races” (those less desirable groups of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe) were the frequent subjects of eugenic studies (i.e., the scientific effort to perfect the human population by controlled breeding, selecting for desired traits). At this time, the American eugenics movement was highly influential, both at home, where it was used to justify legal discrimination, from segregation to immigration restrictions, and abroad, where it served as a model for Nazi Germany.¹⁸ The United States’ eugenics trend was papered over, though, when Americans deemed the Nazis’ national program of racial hygiene a bridge too far. To this day the Holocaust is often understood as the historical turning point, which caused eugenics and the “science of race” to lose favor in scientific and political discourse.

Broadly speaking, the postwar reaction to Nazi race science changed how biology could be used to understand race in American public culture writ large. Accounts of the postwar

¹⁷ Aaron Panofsky and Joan Donovan, “Genetic Ancestry Testing among White Nationalists: From Identity Repair to Citizen Science,” *Social Studies of Science*, July 2, 2019, 030631271986143, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306312719861434>.

¹⁸ Stefan Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (Oxford University Press, 2002); James O. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017), <https://www-degruyter-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/viewbooktoc/product/487115>.

reckoning with biological racism written by social scientists such as Duana Fullwiley and Jenny Reardon point to UNESCO's two "Statements on Race," published in 1951 and 1952, in response to the Nuremberg Trials, as crucial moments that mark this change. These statements rejected race as a valid scientific category, pushing it outside the bounds of legitimate scientific discourse. Even as the country held fast to racial categories, science would disentangle itself from the politicized terminology of race and dispense with former modes of inquiry that went along with it. "New genetics," the name given to the biological study of heredity in the postwar period, has long been heralded as apolitical and non-ideological.¹⁹ While scientific advances since midcentury did in fact constitute a *new* genetics (for instance, the discovery of the double helix in 1953, or the ability to determine nucleotide sequences in the late 1970s, and to mechanize this process in the 1980s), recent accounts such as Reardon's have begun to challenge earlier understandings of postwar biology's ideological neutrality, as well as its methodological "newness."²⁰ Still today, while geneticists may not use the word "race" as a scientific term, prevailing "population" categories often mirror—and therefore reinforce—North American racial categories.²¹

It is not surprising, then, that the Human Genome Project began raising ethical concerns in the 1990s, and that contemporary scientists and STS scholars warn of the ethnic determinism

¹⁹ Jenny Reardon, *Race to the Finish: Identity and Governance in an Age of Genomics*, In-Formation Series xii, 237 p. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

²⁰ Veronika Lipphardt, "'Geographical Distribution Patterns of Various Genes': Genetic Studies of Human Variation after 1945," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 47 (September 2014): 50–61, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsc.2014.05.006>; Jonathan Marks, "The Origins of Anthropological Genetics," *Current Anthropology* 53, no. S5 (April 2012): S161–72, <https://doi.org/10.1086/662333>; Alondra Nelson, *The Social Life of DNA: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation After the Genome* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016).

²¹ Fullwiley, "The Biological Construction of Race"; Morning, "Does Genomics Challenge the Social Construction of Race?"

made possible through the latest craze of genetic ancestry testing. Among them, American literature scholar Patricia E. Chu has argued that contemporary human genetics attempts to “separate phenotype from genotype and allow for a benign deployment of race.”²² Likewise, Madhu Dubey has expressed skepticism toward the superior social impact of DNA, stating, “Focused on invisible cells and molecules instead of skin and anatomy, genomic concepts of race are presumably inaugurating a perceptual shift.”²³ Nevertheless, Dubey suggests that, “Contemporary popular understandings of DNA...revalidate the race concept by way of spurious synonym (DNA=blood=race),” echoing a similar critique made by theorists Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields.²⁴

Yet this is where Ashkenazi Jews’ place in this larger narrative becomes more complicated. To the extent that race is a social project, the boundaries of these categories are never stable. And Jews are a prime example of the fluidity of racial borders. As most scholars indicate, in the postwar period, many Jews (particularly, but not only Ashkenazi) have lost much, if not all, trace of racial marking within the American rubric of whiteness, or in effect “became white.”²⁵ Now racially unmarked, Jews’ difference registers most clearly as religious or cultural,

²² Chu’s project, still in process, considers the ethnic novel specifically, because of that form’s associations with communicating a particular idea about social and civic inclusion. While Chu describes a particular paradox that she understands to dovetail in the last decade of the twentieth century, creating a distinctly new form of the American ethnic novel, these less-than-compatible changing scientific and social paradigms have a longer history. P. E. Chu, “The American Genome Project: A Biopolitical History of the Contemporary Ethno-Racial Novel,” *American Literary History* 25, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 209, <https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/ajs074>.

²³ Madhu Dubey, “Racecraft in American Fiction,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 50, no. 3 (November 1, 2017): 370, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00295132-4194968>.

²⁴ Dubey, 369; See also Karen Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (Verso Books, 2012).

²⁵ Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton University Press, 2006); Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (Rutgers University Press, 1998) Even though Karen Brodtkin’s framework of Jews as “white folks,” does not necessarily leave much space for the possibility of non-white Ashkenazi Jews—or for non-Ashkenazi Jews for that matter—it is useful for the purposes of this dissertation insofar as Brodtkin contributes to the idea that Ashkenazi Jews who might have been read as “off-white” in early twentieth-century United States came to be read as white by the end of that century.

rather than inherent to the body.²⁶ And yet, while the term “Jewish race” is hardly ever heard in mainstream contemporary American culture, “Ashkenazi Jewish” is commonly treated as a “population” in genetic study.²⁷ Whereas Ashkenazi Jews’ “whitening” over the course of the twentieth century attests to the social construction of race, their treatment in biological discourse continues to reflect a notion of stable, static, “pure races.” Of course, as Ann Morning has argued, any attempt to “objectively” group individuals or populations for scientific study is necessarily a social construction.²⁸ One of the main tenets of the field of STS is that we cannot separate science from society—scientific knowledge is still created by human beings, who do not magically vacate their cultural positions when they enter the laboratory. Therefore, the seeming anomaly of Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry, as a population but not a race, both supports and complicates the scholarly understanding of the science of race since the second half of the twentieth century. Ironically—or, perhaps precisely due to the mainstream success of the racial un-marking, or whitening, of many Jews in the United States—very little attention is paid to how the biological discourse of human variation has impacted Jews or Jewish culture post-45.²⁹

While this study intersects with the idea of “Jews as white folks,” I do not ask whether, how, or why some Jews are white within the United States in the 21st century; I will instead analyze how specific texts express specific anxiety around whiteness for American Jews, which should not be conflated with a sense of guilt alone.

²⁶ Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (University of California Press, 1990), 18–19. Waters’ work builds off of Herbert J. Gans’s concept of “symbolic ethnicity,” which defines ethnicity as an elective, enjoyable, and only intermittent activity. It has not always been the case that American Jews fit into this category.

²⁷ Daphna Birenbaum Carmeli, “Prevalence of Jews as Subjects in Genetic Research: Figures, Explanation, and Potential Implications,” *American Journal of Medical Genetics* 130A, no. 1 (2004): 76–83, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajmg.a.20291>.

²⁸ Morning, “Does Genomics Challenge the Social Construction of Race?,” 203.

²⁹ There are, of course, exceptions. See for instance the following special issue. Noah A. Rosenberg and Steven P. Weitzman, “From Generation to Generation: The Genetics of Jewish Populations,” *Human Biology* 85, no. 6 (2013): 817–23.

Thus, the postwar period saw simultaneous—slightly overlapping—projects of the de-biologizing of race and the de-racializing of Jews in public discourse. Significantly, each phenomenon has its own complicated narrative. And the two have sometimes seemed more at odds than logically correlated, as Jewish authors have used the science of race in order to legitimate their claims that Jews are not a race. Indeed, this dissertation traces a trend extending from the anthropological writing of Franz Boas in the 1910s, to Hobson’s anti-antisemitism novel of 1947, in which the very grounds for denying the existence of a unique Jewish race was the “fact” of race as a valid scientific category. Many biological arguments against the distinctiveness of a Jewish race were by no means arguing against the concept of race itself. If anything, they argued for what Matthew Frye Jacobson has called “re-racialization,” rather than anti-racism.³⁰ The fact that the phrase “Jewish race” should today register to my own ear as sinister and pseudoscientific, while race should continue to determine just about every aspect of American life, highlights the extent to which all scientific ideas about race are constructed and socially contingent.

Taking all this in, the persistence of the biological imagination in postwar Jewish American literature presents something of a puzzle. That Jewish literary and cultural production should continue to incorporate, or obsess over, biological theories of inheritance complicates the historical narrative of Jews in the United States as well as the way that Jewish American literature can be understood within American ethnic literature today. Of course, works that express the biological imagination are not always in conversation with ideas of race. And yet, we might go so far as to note that in moments when it is possible to think about Jewish inheritance

³⁰ Matthew Frye Jacobson, “Becoming Caucasian: Vicissitudes of Whiteness in American Politics and Culture,” *Identities* 8, no. 1 (March 2001): 93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2001.9962685>.

through biology, yet in absence of racial ideas, that absence is itself revealing and historically contingent.

Dissertation's Trajectory

The chapters of this dissertation are organized both historically and thematically, moving from the beginning of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first. However, as my dissertation treats materials from approximately a century of Jewish American culture, I do not purport to provide exhaustive coverage; nor is my goal to trace precise, causal, linear connections. Rather, I have selected an assortment of cases, which stand independently and yet intertwined in their use of biological imagination.

Chapter 2 and chapter 3 provide what could be understood as two distinct (yet also overlapping) starting points for this story. Chapter 2 introduces the phenomenon of biological imagination in two key texts for the “immigrant generation” of Jewish American literature: *The Promised Land* (1912) by Mary Antin and *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) by Abraham Cahan. The subsequent chapter provides new stakes for reading Cahan’s work within the framework of biological imagination. It moves laterally to look at the series of Jewish “photographic types” printed in a *McClure’s* magazine article, which supplemented the initial serialization of *David Levinsky* in 1913. Whereas the first chapter on Antin and Cahan looks at the way that these immigrant “rise” narratives incorporate theories of evolution, the following chapter places its source materials within a scientific and popular practice of creating, framing and reading photographs of Jewish faces as racial types. Chapter 4 continues to address the theme of racial typology by analyzing the ways in which Jewish American novels contested Jewish racial typology in response to the Holocaust. These novels narrate characters negotiating new relationships to biological theories of inheritance. Chapter 5 looks at a contemporary

phenomenon also engaged in the re-disciplining of the biological imagination, in which modern Jewish cultural producers attempt to resist the idea of a “biological model” of Jewish (or Yiddish linguistic) inheritance, despite frequently being pulled into a discourse of a “heritable Yiddish.” The conclusion to the dissertation delves into the contemporary phenomenon of Jewish genetics and points toward its literary antecedents from the late-twentieth century.

As this brief sketch shows, the organization of this dissertation—as well as the stories it relates—resists any neat trajectories of biology becoming popular and then unpopular. Nor should readers reach the end of this dissertation and gather that biology has found a surprising resurgence in the contemporary practice of genetic ancestry testing, any more, I hope, than they should reflect on Rich’s poem from the 1980s describing “a mystic biology” and believe that it stands as a literary or historical anomaly. Instead, these case studies show that across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there exists continual resistance, questioning, and attempts to re-shape, the biological imagination. Indeed, the *struggle* over a biological understanding of inheritance unites all of these chapters, each described in greater detail below.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter 2 establishes the phenomenon of biological imagination through two literary texts that often serve as a bedrock of the Jewish American prose tradition in the twentieth century: *The Promised Land* (1912) by Mary Antin and *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) by Abraham Cahan. Here I elucidate both of these texts’ often ignored commitments to evolutionary theory. Bringing together genre readings and critical ethnic readings of both texts, I argue that these intellectual commitments to biology heighten certain tensions with regards to *scale* inherent to their generic constructions as autobiographies. I argue that seeing the political and narrative implications of Jewish immigrant literature’s embrace of biological knowledge forces

us to reconsider the role of biological theories in the immigration debates of the early twentieth century.

Chapter 3 demonstrates further implications of the biological imagination in *David Levinsky*, by analyzing the series of Jewish “photographic types” published alongside the novel’s initial serialization in *McClure’s* magazine. The chapter traces the broader scientific and popular discourse of Jewish photographic typology, beginning with the British eugenicist Francis Galton’s late nineteenth-century composite photographic Jewish types. Despite the popular association of photographic “capture” with instantaneous apprehension, these photographs initiated a typological process of seeing, which promised the ability to see through time, and encouraged viewers to see Jewish history visibly manifest on a subject’s face. The chapter illustrates how early twentieth-century photographic projects used this discourse of typology to facilitate—or frustrate—racial intelligibility.

Chapter 4 looks at the biological imagination in the direct shadow of the Holocaust. I argue that authors of Jewish American fiction levied critiques of American antisemitism by dramatizing the aforementioned typological process of seeing. Doing so allowed them to portray American antisemitism as rooted in visibility and race science. The novels *Di mishpokhe karnovskil/The Family Carnovsky* (1940-1, 1943) by Israel Joshua Singer, *Focus* (1945) by Arthur Miller, and *Gentleman’s Agreement* (1947) by Laura Z. Hobson each uniquely narrate the re-forming of the Jewish American biological imagination on both sides of the pre- and post-war divide.

Chapter 5 argues that the biological imagination offers generative possibilities for the Queer Yiddish movement within Jewish American culture. Despite the artistic and critical movement’s avowed aims to offer alternatives to a “biological model” of Yiddish inheritance, I

contend that an idea of “heritable Yiddish” often pervades Queer Yiddish art and critique, bolstered by an analysis of the bilingual (Yiddish-English) poetry of Irena Klepfisz. By offering a genealogy of “heritable Yiddish”—assembling sources ranging from Franz Kafka to Uriel Weinreich, to the contemporary Amazon series, *Transparent* (2014-2019)—this chapter seeks to explicitly articulate what is often taken for granted in Queer Yiddish critique: that biologically informed notions of Jewish cultural transmission are active in postwar Jewish culture and difficult to discard.

In the conclusion to the dissertation, I discuss the contemporary cultural phenomenon of Jewish genetics. Widespread Jewish American participation in genetic discourse (through genetic ancestry testing and Jewish genetic history) stands as the contemporary moment’s most significant iteration of the biological imagination. This conclusion points to the current moment’s antecedents in late twentieth-century Jewish American culture and letters: in particular, Adrienne Rich’s cycle of poetry, *Sources* (1982), which is suffused in genetic imagery. I use *Sources* (and the brief counterexample of Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint* (1967)) to highlight the ability of genetic knowledge to produce new models of Jewish diaspora. Together, these sources point to the endurance of the biological imagination in Jewish American culture. The conclusion, and the dissertation as a whole, helps us to make sense of the contemporary proliferation and power of narratives woven out of biological knowledge.

Chapter 2 “The Promised Land of Evolution:” The Role of Evolutionary Thought in Early 20th-Century Jewish American Immigrant Narratives

In the early twentieth century, the authors Mary Antin and Abraham Cahan published major literary works about Eastern European Jewish immigrants finding America—and then, finding evolutionary theory. As immigrant narratives, Antin’s *The Promised Land* (1914) and Cahan’s *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) fit into what is now legible as a tradition in Jewish American prose literature: a “rise” narrative following the life of an individual born in Eastern Europe, who arrives in the United States as a traditional Jew with little in the way of secular education or economic resources, and then eventually assimilates to American culture and finds success—whether educational or economic.³¹ The texts’ emotional tenors serve as foils for one another:³² Antin’s narrative appears extremely earnest in its message of embracing the American way of life; Cahan’s is satirical, if not altogether sardonic.³³ However, in spite of these two texts’ strikingly different tones and purported political agendas, both protagonists ultimately claim to be deeply influenced by evolutionary theory—or, as described by Antin, “the promised land of evolution.”

³¹ This is a version of the American “rags to riches” trope typified in the works of Horatio Alger and perhaps most famously realized in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* by William Dean Howells. Howells was an important champion of Cahan and his work. The title *The Rise of David Levinsky* is certainly paying homage to Howell’s novel.

³² As Werner Sollors notes, “Antin’s *Promised Land* started with the divided world of Russia and ended on a note of unified fulfillment in America; Cahan’s *Levinsky* inverts this process and shows the successfully assimilated protagonist reminiscing about his lost Old World identity.” Werner Sollors, “Immigration and Modernity 1900-1945,” in *The Cambridge History of Jewish American Literature*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 92.

³³ 6/30/21 11:36:00 AM

Antin's and Cahan's works were published toward the end of a roughly 40-year period (1881-1924), in which the United States saw its highest level of Jewish immigration in its history. This wave of Jewish immigration coincided with and contributed to searing national debates over the "changing face" of America, which culminated in federal legislation intended to curb this trend.³⁴ The immigration debates of the early 20th century were shaped by nativism, racism, and xenophobia, and intellectually underwritten by a growing American eugenics movement. Accordingly, we might assume that the mention of Spencer or Darwin in early twentieth-century immigrant texts would cast a deterministic, essentialist pall over the works. However, as I show in this chapter, the place of evolutionary biological thinking in *David Levinsky* and the *Promised Land* (and in this moment of Jewish American culture) is rather more complex. These texts make use of evolutionary theories in order to conceive of potential dynamism within the strictures of programmatic Americanization. Within these narratives, biological theories of inheritance and evolution allow for a new schema of how the Jewish past lives in these "made over" immigrants.

Tensions in Scale and the Biological Imagination

The genre of autobiography is critical to both works. This chapter will continuously return to the respective conventions used within evolutionary theory and within the genre of autobiography to represent history and transformation, the individual and the group. Antin's is a more sincere iteration of the autobiography, whereas Cahan's could be understood as a fictional

³⁴ The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was met by additional acts in 1907 (to keep out Asian immigrants beyond Chinese and Japanese) and 1917 (to limit South and East European immigrants, and require a reading test). The Immigration Act of 1924 (Johnson Reed Act) implemented the starkest quota system, which mandated that immigration should allow for the United States to maintain the national/racial proportions of the year 1890. Asian immigrants were excluded from this formula. "Milestones: 1921–1936 - Office of the Historian," accessed March 1, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act>.

parody of the form. Nevertheless, the autobiographic genre sets narrative parameters for both texts and informs my analysis. In particular, I attend to the genre's constitutive tension between the auto- and the ethno-, the need to speak for one's self, and the need, as Antin puts it, to "speak for thousands."³⁵ This need to speak for the self and the need to speak for a larger community has been a central concern in scholarship on Jewish life writing.³⁶ The genre's competing impulses—to serve as a representative example of a large group, and to narrate an individual, extraordinary, life—constitutes what I call a tension in scale.

Yet this is only the first tension in scale identifiable in Cahan and Antin's texts. The second is the logical tension of applying evolutionary theories to the story of an individual within a literary work. Perhaps it seems fitting that the idea of "evolution" would appeal as a model for narrating self-development. Indeed, Darwin's theory of evolution addresses history and temporality, and his work is rich with plot.³⁷ However, his gradualist theory contends that an individual does not herself evolve or mutate, but rather serves as what Gillian Beer has called both a "vehicle and a dead-end."³⁸ Therefore, the very adoption of evolutionary theory (which functions on the scale of environments, species, and populations) in an autobiographic narrative presents a further tension in scale.³⁹ Seeing the connection between these two seeming paradoxes,

³⁵ Antin, *The Promised Land*, 72.

³⁶ Perhaps most tellingly, Marcus Moseley's 2006 monograph on Jewish autobiography is titled *Being For Myself Alone*. Marcus Moseley, *Being For Myself Alone: Origins of Jewish Autobiography* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006); See also Anita Norich, "The Family Singer and the Autobiographical Imagination," *Prooftexts* 10, no. 1 (January 1, 1990): 91–107; Alan L. Mintz, *"Banished from Their Father's Table": Loss of Faith and Hebrew Autobiography*, Jewish Literature and Culture (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

³⁷ George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

³⁸ Gillian. Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London ; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 43.

³⁹ Alexis Harley argues that this very logical tension has not stopped many—including 19th-century natural scientists themselves—from conceiving of personal development through the theoretical model of evolution. Alexis Harley, *Autobiologies: Charles Darwin and the Natural History of the Self*, xvii, 213 pages (Lewisburg

these two tensions in scale, will offer insight into the ways that Cahan and Antin narrate assimilation and grapple with the notion of a bodily Jewish inheritance. Both tensions can be identified in both texts, but I will first introduce two brief illustrations from *The Promised Land*.

Antin writes self-consciously about the generic tension in scale in her autobiography. Indeed, she brings our attention to the question of exemplarity early on in the text, famously asking in mock humility, “Should I be sitting here, chattering of my infantile adventures, if I did not know that I was speaking for thousands?”⁴⁰ She then continues, “I might say ‘you’ or ‘he’ instead of ‘I.’” Perhaps it is not surprising that Antin semantically sidesteps her gender in order to emphasize the universality of her story, seeing as representative status and the very practice of writing autobiography were themselves usually reserved for men.⁴¹ Antin reports to her readers that her rationale in providing autobiographic detail is the possibility that readers can extrapolate from her life the vast, universal pattern of Jewish life and immigration. That is, for Antin the tension between the autobiographic and the ethnographic is quite easily resolved through an assertion of synecdoche, that she is a part for a whole. In fact, the very potential for ethnographic insight gives her the mandate to write her autobiography.

However, in other passages, she reaches an apparently opposite conclusion. Antin brings our attention to the contradiction between evolution and autobiography toward the book’s end, when she acknowledges her desire to reconcile her sense of individual significance and a

[Pennsylvania] : Lanham, Maryland: Bucknell University Press ; Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2015), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

⁴⁰ Antin, *The Promised Land*, 72.

⁴¹ Referring to her own youth here, Antin writes of her non-gendered “infantile adventures” and claims that the pronoun of her protagonist could as easily be a universal “you” or “he” as it could be “I,” though never a she. This passage amounts to a bold claim of representativeness—such a claim, as Anita Norich has argued, would not typically be granted to the female author of an autobiography. Norich, “The Family Singer and the Autobiographical Imagination.”

newfound knowledge of the “geological ages.”⁴² She writes, “Thinking in aeons and in races, instead of in years and individuals, somehow lightened the burden of intelligence, and filled me anew with a sense of youth and well-being.”⁴³ Natural science affords Antin a larger scale of thinking: on the level of “aeons” rather than “years,” and “races” rather than the “individual.” It allows her to deny her own personal significance. Here, learning about natural science causes Antin to conclude that she is *not* a sufficient part for a whole: the scale of the individual seems ultimately too small for synecdochal representation. Therefore, biological knowledge reintroduces the generic tension of autobiography that Antin had seemingly so easily cast aside.

This insight is especially ironic, because it arrives at the very end of the book—when the autobiographical subject ought to be nearing the completion of her *bildung*. Yet Antin repeatedly describes this intellectual coming of age and the mental lightness it affords her as akin to youth. She writes later, “I did not become a finished philosopher from hearing a couple of hundred lectures on scientific subjects. I did not even become a finished woman. If anything, I grew rather more girlish.”⁴⁴ Not only is Antin “filled...anew with a sense of youth and well-being”—this sense of youth is a markedly gendered one. Beyond “girlish”—a specific form of youthful femininity—she also expresses later that on days that she spent exploring the woods, she was inclined to “play the tomboy”—another female presentation of gender, tied to youth. Even the other descriptions in this passage, “a finished philosopher” and “a finished woman,” point to gendered positions—a philosopher can seek truths that apply to all, whereas a woman can only speak for herself (if that). This moment challenges what we had imagined to be a narrative of

⁴² Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists*, In Antin’s time, geology served as a model science for biology.

⁴³ Antin, *The Promised Land*, 261–62.

⁴⁴ Antin, 262.

complete development or rise: scientific knowledge causes her to move playfully back in time, rather than toward a pre-determined telos. And perhaps most surprisingly, causes her to describe herself in gendered and feminine terms within this reversed development. In other words, the acknowledged tension involved in mapping Mary's intellectual and personal development onto scientific theories of evolution also serves to undermine some of the text's prior claims about the genderless (or male) universal significance of the narrative.⁴⁵

Exploring the relation between these two tensions in scale—the generic and the scientific—will invite us to see how crucial biological imagination is to the narratives formed in both *The Promised Land* and *David Levinsky*. These texts not only incorporate biological theories, but their protagonists also pledge allegiance to them. What difference does it make that these authors turned to biology, rather than any other secular or privileged form of knowledge, in order to make sense of these Jewish immigrants' lives? As I will later elaborate—in spite of its popular perception as nefariously teleological—evolution in particular contributes a complex conceptualization of history and temporality and is therefore ripe for narrative engagement. Moreover, Darwin's biological theories can, perhaps surprisingly, draw our attention to material and social change, even as the protagonists wonder over the idea of an essential or constant, Jewish bodily inheritance.

The biological imagination here is a creative negotiation of a particular kind of knowledge; biology is a way of knowing about the material body, but not a shorthand for it. This

⁴⁵ A note on the names I use in this chapter: Mary Antin is both the protagonist and the author of *The Promised Land*. In this chapter, in order to differentiate between these two roles or “versions” of her, I will generally use the name “Antin” to refer to the author of the *Promised Land* and the name “Mary” to refer to the person we encounter in the text. This is admittedly a slippery distinction. In order to maintain an equitable sense of presumed intimacy between myself and each of the protagonists, I will refer to David Levinsky, the eponymous protagonist of Cahan's novel, as “David,” even though critics of the novel often refer to him as “Levinsky” (as can be found in passages brought into this chapter.) I will refer to the novel as *David Levinsky*.

is a crucial distinction within a field like American immigrant literature in which there is often skittishness about the very word. Biology is often taken to mean “essence” or “essentialism.”⁴⁶ For instance, Sarah Wilson argues that as much as race, bodies, and physical difference were critical elements of Cahan and Antin’s moment’s prevailing progressive “melting pot” discourse, “Literary discourse seemed to promise the best means of being faithless to biology and materiality.”⁴⁷ Wilson defines the literary in opposition to the biological. I agree with the analysis that an American “melting pot” discourse could be a way of shaping the world, with disregard for apparent material constraints. And yet, I caution against equating biology too neatly with material reality. I will instead explore moments in Antin and Cahan’s texts in which biological knowledge is an integral part of precisely the literary turn that Wilson so aptly describes.

The authors considered in this chapter do not write about biological theories seamlessly, rationally, or free of complication. The internal tensions and contradictions are apparent on the surfaces of the texts. We must approach these authors’ handling of biological knowledge with care, precisely because materiality and physical bodies were so important to the debates around assimilation in the Progressive Era. Seeing as Antin’s and Cahan’s works follow immigrants from a linguistic, religious, ethnic minority, their application of evolutionism is implicated in the burgeoning discourse of Americanization and ethnicity. Accordingly, this chapter will also explore the scientific, intellectual, and political, context surrounding *David Levinsky* and *The Promised Land*, with special attention to the theories of Darwin and Spencer, their reception in

⁴⁶ For instance, Jonathan Freedman, *Klezmer America: Jewishness, Ethnicity, Modernity*, xi, 388 p. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>; Schreier, *The Impossible Jew*; Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*.

⁴⁷ Sarah Wilson, *Melting-Pot Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 25, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

Jewish culture and the role of biological vocabulary in debates around immigration and Americanization.

David Levinsky: A Satire of Social Darwinism

In Abraham Cahan's novel detailing the life of an early twentieth century industrialist, David (the titular character) often uses Spencerian and Darwinian principles to understand his transformation in the United States, and in order to rationalize his capitalist activities. This might be how readers today would expect to encounter the theories of Darwin in an immigrant narrative, considering that, according to Greta Jones, Darwin "was used from the beginning as a defense of 'laissez faire' capitalism."⁴⁸ Gilded Age American tycoons often invoked Spencer in order to both naturalize and rationalize their economic activities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, in the novel, David attributes his initial discovery and interest in Spencer to his frustration with the cloak-makers' union that organizes his employees.⁴⁹ He applies evolutionary theory in order to understand not only Americanization, but also wealth accumulation and social mobility. Evolutionary theories provide David with an authoritative model to legitimize his pre-existing attitudes as a manufacturer and allow him to view himself as a "Victor of Existence."⁵⁰

Nonetheless, Cahan's own ideological and educational background presents a useful foil to that of David. The fact that Cahan was the editor of New York's most prominent Yiddish socialist daily newspaper should lead readers to consider the fictional interpretation of Spencer

⁴⁸ Greta Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought: The Interaction Between Biological and Social Theory* (Brighton, Sussex : Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Harvester Press ; Humanities Press, 1980), 35.

⁴⁹ Abraham Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Reprint edition (New York, N.Y., U.S.A: Penguin Classics, 1993), 282.

⁵⁰ Cahan, 283.

and Darwin as satirical.⁵¹ Still, Cahan's own view of Spencer would better be described as fruitful rather than entirely cynical. In fact, as Steven Cassedy has pointed out, Cahan's investment in Spencerian theory might be more appropriately attributed to his Russian education than to his own experience of Americanization. Cassedy places Cahan as a part of a generation of Russian Jewish intellectuals who emigrated to the United States already educated and invested in radical politics. As such, Cahan and his peers had been introduced to Spencer and Darwin within the context of Russian nihilism. Cahan felt that his role was to bring the ideas espoused by Spencer to American audiences. For instance, in one speech that Cahan gave and then published as an article in the *Workmen's Advocate*, he cited Spencer in an effort to educate his audience about Realism, which in his view served a necessarily political and social function. In his fiction, however, Cahan represents Spencer as an American novelty that enlightens the Russian-born protagonist.

In *David Levinsky*, much like in the *Promised Land*, Darwinian and Spencerian paradigms are a late arrival in David's education, but David describes his encounter with these ideas as one of recognition rather than discovery. When he reads an editorial citing "the survival of the fittest" and "the struggle for existence," he thinks, "Why, that is just what I have been saying all these days." He continues, "I almost felt as though Darwin and Spencer had plagiarized a discovery of mine."⁵² He thinks of a story his friend Nodelman had told him about fighting chickens, and it occurs to him that they had essentially come up with the same theory themselves. What *The Promised Land* presents as a mind-opening, paradigm-shifting, ecstatic revelation (by calling Darwin's theory "the promised land"), is sardonically cast in Cahan's

⁵¹ Steven Cassedy, *To the Other Shore: The Russian Jewish Intellectuals Who Came to America*, xxiii, 197 p. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 130, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

⁵² Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, 282.

novel as circular, self-legitimizing encounter. Spencer and Darwin's writing about natural selection provides the same wisdom as an allegory about animals, yet of course, biology's scientific authority distinguishes it from the folktale.

Even though David sees such a clear connection between the laws of evolution as laid out by Spencer and Darwin and his own ideas about competition, there are crucial differences between their theories and his own personal credo. David describes the theory he has developed as, "The able fellows succeed, and the misfits fail. Then the misfits begrudge those who accomplish things."⁵³ David's philosophy plays on the language of Spencer—"able" rings with physicality; the "able fellow" is not only one who *can do* something but one who is "able-bodied." A similar play on words occurs in which the "misfit" is both one who does not *fit in*, as well as one who is not "fit," let alone "the fittest." However, David's idea is far more personalized than Spencer's, as it is about the human emotion of resentment. He is not asking or answering questions about why some people fail and others succeed. He is asking how an individual should live in a world ostensibly governed by such laws as Survival of the Fittest. And yet these theories neutralize the moral struggle he may feel regarding his exploitation of workers and accumulation of vast sums of money. The explanation for resentment or guilt within the capitalist system is simply: Nature. And this is a nature that applies on the level of the individual, and the group.

As his story goes on, David continually invokes the "struggle for life,"⁵⁴ and sees business through the lens of "survival of the fittest."⁵⁵ For instance, when he moves his business

⁵³ Cahan, 282.

⁵⁴ Cahan, 374.

⁵⁵ Cahan, 355.

to a tonier neighborhood, he describes the move as “an official confirmation of my being one of the fittest.”⁵⁶ In this expression of proper Social Darwinism, David interprets the dogma of “survival of the fittest” similarly to the Protestant Ethic. David constantly looks to his economic successes as confirmation of his personal status as “fittest,” much like individuals might look to their economic success as validation that they have God’s grace. Just after David moves his offices to Broadway, he feels that his wealth is still inadequate. He declares, “My fortune was not climbing rapidly enough...Why, there were so many illiterate dunces who had not even heard of Darwin and Spencer who were worth more,” tying his economic worth to his having read Darwin and Spencer.⁵⁷ Further cementing these theories’ quasi-spiritual status, David believes that his very *knowledge* of the theories of fitness are a part of what earns his spot on the sliding scale of “economic fitness.”

This attitude about the power of knowing Darwinian and Spencerian theories creeps up as soon as David is made aware of them. At first, as noted previously, David is elated to encounter these thinkers’ ideas. But then he admits, “when I dipped into *Social Statistics*, I was overborne by the wondrous novelty of the thing and by a sense of my own futility, ignorance, and cheapness.”⁵⁸ The writing was so dense and complex that it made him acutely aware of his own lack of erudition and worth. Once he rereads and comprehends the books, though, he thinks, “It was as though all the wonders of learning, acumen, ingenuity, and assiduity displayed in these works had been intended, among other purposes, to establish my title as one of the victors of

⁵⁶ Cahan, 347.

⁵⁷ Cahan, 347–48.

⁵⁸ Cahan, 282.

Existence.”⁵⁹ There seems to be a double meaning here, regarding the scientific works’ medium and message. The message (the theory of “Survival of the Fittest”) allows David to see himself as fit; but so does the fact that these books are so complex, so challenging to grasp, and so comprehensive in their scope. The accomplishment of reading these works and being able to appreciate their “wonders of learning, acumen, ingenuity, and assiduity” ultimately transfers those attributes to the reader. These theories come to serve as cultural markers, much like any sign of educational distinction. His biological knowledge is not only an internal lens used for his own self-reckoning, but also an external badge that he can wear.

He goes on to use the names, “Darwin” and “Spencer” as currency for his own upward mobility. When David decides to move into his own furnished room, he is pleased to find a bookcase there, and thinks, “I am going to buy a complete set of Spencer and some other books. Won’t the bookcases look fine! I shall read, read, read.”⁶⁰ In David’s fantasy, he will read endlessly, and his books will also, primarily, act as furnishing. They will make his room “look fine.” Elsewhere, Cahan writes sardonically of female characters who are interested in cultivating their own personal taste and performed identities through books. David’s meditation on the bookshelf is perhaps most reminiscent of Flora, the protagonist in “The Imported Bridegroom” (1896), who has a “neat little library” and views herself as unique among her peers because she reads the novels of Thackeray and Dickens.⁶¹ These novels furnish her bedroom and signal her hopes of upward mobility. Flora falls into a common trope for female characters in Realist texts—a silly young girl who reads too many novels and believes that her life should look

⁵⁹ Cahan, 283.

⁶⁰ Cahan, 304.

⁶¹ Abraham Cahan, *Yekl and The Imported Bridegroom, and Other Stories of the New York Ghetto* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 93.

like one. In David we find a similar phenomenon, though rather than faith in the narrative model of fiction, he has faith in the narrative model laid out in the theories of Spencer and Darwin. A faith which the novel casts in a similarly critical light.

Later, at a crucial point in the novel, David is mocked and challenged by a fellow travelling salesman named Loeb, and David uses Spencerian and Darwinian concepts in order to defend his status among his peers. After someone mentions the concept of competition, David “hastened to refer to the struggle for life and the survival of the fittest,” after which, “Loeb dared not burlesque [him].”⁶² David wields his knowledge of biology as a cultural shibboleth, and his application of evolutionary theory to understand capitalism is received as such by the other businessmen. Being conversant in these theories, and performing knowledge of them, ultimately earns David his place among the “stars” of the smoker car.⁶³ Thus, David proves he is one of the “fittest” and signals access to elite forms of secular American knowledge. In these scenes, whether in the intimate spaces of a furnished apartment or a smoker car, the value of Spencerian theory and “survival of the fittest” is conferred on the individual. And indeed, it seems to easily support American capitalist individualism.

The Mock Autobiography

The novel’s status as mock autobiography might be lost on readers who encounter it today in a tidy Penguin Classics paperback edition. But the novel’s original instantiation as a serialized narrative published in *McClures* magazine across several months in 1913 amplify its place in the autobiographic genre. The series was published as “The Autobiography of An American Jew,” with editorial framing never once using the words “fiction,” “story,” “sketch,”

⁶² Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, 329.

⁶³ Cahan, 329.

or “realism,” but instead claiming that the protagonist, “has a career more sensational than could be conjured up by any man’s imagination.”⁶⁴ The magazine strove to make Cahan’s creation invisible; it blurred the line between realist fiction and reality, as the magazine told readers that it would show, “by concrete example, the minute workings of that wonderful machine, the Jewish brain.”⁶⁵ Of course, the most basic generic boundary between the biography and autobiography is the “auto”: the author who writes their own story. If part of the autobiography’s unique authority comes from the intimacy of author and subject, implicit in this authority is a purported accuracy, a verisimilitude, a promise that events “actually happened.” In this regard, the literary form of the autobiography proves valuable to a magazine that publishes mostly nonfiction.

At the same time, Cahan was hyper-visible in the framing. Presenting the “Autobiography” of David Levinsky, “by Abraham Cahan” diminishes any illusion that what was printed was truly a life story written by the protagonist himself. In the introduction to the series, the editor emphasized that this immigrant narrative was filtered through an “expert,” so as to represent the “type” with accuracy.⁶⁶ This is what Brent Hayes Edwards would call an “authenticating” introduction, which prepares readers to be taken “inside” the space of the other.⁶⁷ The fact that Cahan was a journalist and newspaper editor—and not only a published author of American-brand realist fiction in English, hailed by William Dean Howells as a “new

⁶⁴ Abraham Cahan, “The Autobiography of An American Jew: The Rise of David Levinsky,” *McClure’s*, April 1913, Hathi Trust.

⁶⁵ Burton J. Hendrick, “The Jewish Invasion of America,” *McClure’s*, April 1913, 165.

⁶⁶ The representation of poor, immigrant, or regional characters was a noted goal in American literary Realism. Cahan’s earlier works published in English including, most notably, *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* and stories such as “A Providential Match,” and “The Imported Bridegroom” all fit into this phenomenon. However, they are each narrated by an omniscient third-person narrator, rather than by an autobiographic “I.”

⁶⁷ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 39, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

star of Realism”⁶⁸—contributed to this authentication. According to the magazine’s introduction, Cahan’s position as editor of the Yiddish-language daily, the *Forverts/Forward*, authorizes him as the so-called chronicler of David’s so-called life.⁶⁹

The editorial insistence on accuracy in the preface is striking. It claims that, “Levinsky is, in fact, an actual type; his story reproduces actual characters, occurrences, and situations taken from real life.”⁷⁰ Actuality, factuality, and reproduction of reality all bind the fictional story. The editorial voice asserts that Cahan’s narrative, “shows, as no invention could do...” what in the Jew’s character has allowed for his economic success. Implicitly and explicitly, they claim that this story and this character are *not* invented. It seems oxymoronic to the genre to present an *autobiography* written by another, and to purport the veracity of fiction. These contradictions only compound upon the tensions in scale, inherent in autobiography: a life narrative of a particular, extraordinary individual, who also can serve as an ethnographically representative figure or “type” (a concept explored in the chapter to come). Yet it highlights the Realist desire for truth and accuracy. So too, this framing of Cahan’s story also points to the desire to see scientific observations, theories, or hypotheses play out in an individual’s life.

Darwinism and Narrative

Cahan’s satirical novel illustrates the deterministic potential of biological imagination in early twentieth-century American immigrant narratives. However, some less popularly

⁶⁸ Jules Chametsky, “Introduction,” in *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Reprinted Edition (New York: Penguin Classics, 1993), xii.

⁶⁹ The editor’s introduction to the first installment tells readers that, “Abraham Cahan, the chronicler of this progress, is editor of the great Yiddish daily newspaper, the ‘Forward’ of New York. He has probably the most intimate knowledge of Jewish life of any many in America.” Cahan, “The Autobiography of An American Jew: The Rise of David Levinsky,” 92–93.

⁷⁰ Cahan, 92.

considered elements of Darwin's theories can lead to altogether different sorts of immigrant narratives. Over the past several decades, scholars in Victorian studies in particular have illustrated how Darwin's works, such as *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man*, can be treated as literary texts. Not only are Darwin's naturalistic writings almost relentlessly metaphorical and densely emplotted, they were simultaneously a great influence *on* literature and deeply influenced *by* literature.⁷¹ This section will give a primer on Darwinian theory as it pertains to the investments of Antin and Cahan's texts on the levels of narrative and American ethnicity. To do so, it is crucial to distinguish between Spencer (aligned with "social Darwinism") and Darwin, and how they each conceived of teleology, competition, and heterogeneity—all concepts of great consequence for an ethnically diverse society.

Charles Darwin did not originate the concept of Evolution, but he is the biological thinker whose name is most often associated with it. To a great extent, Darwinian thought in American culture has been funneled through "Social Darwinism"—which is itself far more aligned with the evolutionary theories of Darwin's contemporary, Herbert Spencer. Spencer was immensely popular in the post-bellum United States (even more so than Darwin). By the beginning of the twentieth century, even though Spencer's explicit popularity had waned, his theories had nonetheless already permeated the culture.⁷² The system that Spencer offered was, above all else, monolithic and universal; he drew upon biology, geology, and political economy, and forged a

⁷¹ It is frequently pointed out that the two books Darwin brought with him on his Beagle voyage were by Milton and Lyell.

⁷² Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, 248 p. (New York: G. Braziller, 1959), 50, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

theory that would speak to all of these areas.⁷³ When Spencer writes of “mass” and “bodies,” these terms are meant to describe as divergent things as celestial bodies, molecules, the earth’s surface, and factory workers. This is because Spencer presented social laws as instantiations of general principles.⁷⁴ Spencer did not purport to apply—he *synthesized*.⁷⁵ This insistence on a universal, synthetic theory is one of the key differences between Spencer and Darwin’s views of society’s relation to the natural world. Spencer wrote that, “Instead of civilization being artificial, it is a part of nature; all a piece with the development of the embryo or the unfolding of a flower.”⁷⁶ Spencer’s theory explicitly analogizes the embryo-into-individual development and societal or species developments. For Spencer, this universal view of evolution occurs on every level and throughout every form.

One more key distinction between Spencer and Darwin’s differing views of evolution would be their attitude toward teleology. Spencer, like Darwin, theorized evolution as increasing complexity over time. However, Spencer viewed evolution teleologically, as the transition “from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity, to a definite, coherent heterogeneity.”⁷⁷ According to his theory, anything homogenous was unstable (a “moving body”), in that it would inevitably become heterogeneous. Moreover, this inevitable, increasing heterogeneity only took place up until a certain point of equilibrium or “equilibration,” where the increase in complexity would

⁷³ Spencer’s influences included the social and economic (his context in industrializing Britain, laissez-faire principles, Malthusian struggle), as well as the geological (Lyell), and biological (Lamarck’s theory of development and Von Baer’s laws of embryology). See Hofstadter, 35.

⁷⁴ Hofstadter, 36.

⁷⁵ See, for instance, the title of Herbert Spencer, *Synthetic Philosophy* (New York London: D. Appleton & co., 1908).

⁷⁶ Herbert Spencer, qtd. in Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, 40.

⁷⁷ Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, 6th ed. (New York: Appleton, 1909), 351.

cease.⁷⁸ Therefore, even if Spencerian theory supports an understanding of evolution involving increased complexity and heterogeneity, this heterogeneity is ultimately in service of a defined end. As such, teleological notions of evolution are indebted to Spencer, even if they are technically “social Darwinist.”

Darwin contributed to evolutionary theory the conceptualization and naming of the process, “natural selection.” Natural selection explains how species evolve, adapt, and survive in particular environments. Darwin was influenced by the geologist Charles Lyell, the champion of Uniformitarianism (a geological gradualist theory). Gradualism—which theorizes a slowly, constantly changing natural world—directly opposes catastrophism—which theorizes that the world undergoes change in rare, large-scale events. Darwin’s predecessors, practitioners of natural theology, modeled their view of the natural world after astronomy.⁷⁹ Because of this, they tended to understand nature as static and harmonious, governed by laws that keep balance, rather than cause continuous change.⁸⁰ By comparison, Darwin’s insistence on history, surprise, and complexity appears rather radical.

Darwin’s investment in history and change over time is precisely where his theories rub up against teleological thinking. In Social Darwinism, there are certain species or races that ought to—or will inevitably—survive where others die out. Admittedly, the idea of Natural Selection is often interpreted as a natural progression toward *only* the strongest winning out.

⁷⁸ Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, 37.

⁷⁹ Ernst Mayr, *The Growth of Biological Thought: Diversity, Evolution, and Inheritance* (Harvard University Press, 1982), 34.; Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists*, 36.

⁸⁰ Darwin both drew upon and diverged from natural theology, a school of thought rooted in eighteenth-century rationalism, which showed “bias toward systems that treat regularities, closed systems, recurrences, and clearly defined relationships, and which assumes that explanations will always be assimilable to the forms of rational discourse.” Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists*, 21.

Alternately, the critic Elizabeth Grosz remind us, we could see that in Darwin's idea of evolution, there is actually no telos, only mutating in yet-unimagined directions, over a great period of time.⁸¹ As Levine has argued, "Darwin sees adaptation as contingent and incomplete, however breathtakingly wonderful it can be."⁸² In Grosz's and Levine's readings of Darwin, evolution is contingent, rather than inevitable; always in the middle of a process, and therefore lacking any defined endpoint. In other words, these scholars invite us to see Darwin's theories as resisting teleology.

When we consider the salience of Darwin's theories in contact with American culture and American debates about immigration, one might presume that Darwinian theories would mandate teleological Americanization and assimilation. However, Darwin's theories—especially the assertion of a natural tendency toward variation among individuals and among species—can instead be seen as antithetical to a teleological, coercive Americanization. As many acknowledge, Darwin's writings on the workings of nature transpose social theories coming out of industrializing Britain—Malthus's concept of "struggle for existence," most notably—onto the natural and animal world.⁸³ Spencer famously transposes this very same Malthusian idea into the social, economic, and biological concept of "survival of the fittest," writing in his *Principles of Biology* that his concept was but a different terminology of "natural selection."⁸⁴

Darwin himself writes about "struggle for existence" in *On the Origin of Species* in a decidedly ambivalent and cautious manner. He notes that, "I use the term Struggle for Existence

⁸¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁸² Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists*, 103.

⁸³ Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, 58.

⁸⁴ Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Biology*, vol. 2 (D. Appleton, 1891), 444–45.

in a large and metaphorical sense, including dependence of one being on another...”⁸⁵ This point is both striking and often ignored when we think of Social Darwinism. Understanding the “Struggle for Survival” as a metaphor, or a catchall phrase, to describe interdependence of one species on another is indeed very different in tenor from the cultural notion of “survival of the fittest,” theorized by Spencer—even if it seems an insufficient denouncement of Spencer’s brand of the theory. Darwin’s explanation is consistent with one of the main rallying cries in *Origin* about diversity within species and between them: that no species is independently created ex nihilo, and following that logic, no species emerges, endures, or evolves alone.⁸⁶ Moreover, even when he analogizes the natural world and the social world, he presents an image that is peaceful, cooperative, and interdependent. Darwin writes, “[t]he advantage of diversification in the inhabitants of the same region is, in fact, the same as that of physiological division of labour in the organs of the same individual body...”⁸⁷ This corporal analogy communicates a shared goal of life (rather than a zero-sum competition among species) within a single environment.⁸⁸ Even though a phrase like “struggle for existence” is often understood to be encoded with teleology, Darwin asserts that he understands the term “struggle for existence” to describe a non-competitive, non-teleological, symbiotic phenomenon.

Darwin’s cooperative definition of “struggle for existence” is further elaborated in his descriptions of contemporaneous diversity—a concept that is of particular interest when we

⁸⁵ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, ed. William Bynum, 1 edition (Cambridge; London: Penguin Classics, 2009), 65.

⁸⁶ Darwin, 15.

⁸⁷ Darwin, 110.

⁸⁸ This is, in fact, a doubled metaphor, as the notion of “division of labor” invokes societal or economic systems. Therefore, Darwin invites us to imagine the various creatures within a region as organs in a body and as human laborers within a society. Again, we see him transposing social theory onto the natural world.

consider Darwin's influence on authors of American immigrant literature. Regarding Darwin's interest in diversity, scholars often point to his famous "entangled bank" passage, in which he writes,

"It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us."⁸⁹

The image of the "entangled bank" that Darwin asks us to contemplate encompasses a diversity of flora and fauna, all moving and existing together—a balance that is not static, but one that bustles interdependently. Even within this illustration of synchronic difference, there is internal movement of the various pieces, and the underlying laws that have created the various pieces continue to govern them in the present. This passage asks us to appreciate the continuation of the "laws"—to see these evolutionary forces as both past and present. In Darwin's entangled bank, we find at once a natural world that has a history, that is diverse, and that is constantly, slowly changing.

This brief foray into evolutionary theory will help to appreciate, in the following section, just how differently Antin's and Cahan's autobiographic subjects each understand the theories of Darwin. Popular conceptions of evolution that presume a definite endpoint have been influenced by the thoughts of Spencer far more than by those of Darwin (even if the former paid homage to the latter). Oftentimes in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the popular dissemination of evolutionary thought did not necessarily differentiate between Lamarck, Darwin, and Spencer as we might imagine—no doubt, the fact that Spencer himself wrote of his

⁸⁹ Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 426.

theories as building off of these other scientists contributed to the conflation.⁹⁰ In the popular press, the evolutionists were often mentioned together, and not in opposition. It is therefore useful to acknowledge the significant intellectual differences between the various evolutionary thinkers while simultaneously recognizing the popular blurring of them. Moreover, accounting for the common blurring that occurred between the various evolutionary theories in the wider culture illustrates how a scientific discourse becomes a literary discourse through biological imagination, such as in *The Promised Land*.

***The Promised Land* and Programmatic Change**

The title of Mary Antin's 1912 autobiography, *The Promised Land* has most often been understood as a reference to the United States—the land to which she emigrated from Russia, her own “Egypt.” *The Promised Land* has become nearly synonymous with the early-twentieth-century Jewish immigration narrative: Antin's autobiographic subject goes from Malinke to Mary, and as she moves through public schools and settlement houses, she is consumed by a desire to learn and to become American. Through a settlement house, she joins a club for natural history hobbyists, attending lectures on insects and scientific theories, and taking excursions to the nature surrounding Boston. In the narration of these experiences, Antin uses the book's titular phrase again, to describe her encounter with the theories of Darwin. She writes, “...the high peaks of the promised land of evolution did flash on my vision in the earlier days, and with these to guide me I rebuilt the world, and found it much nobler than it had ever been before, and took great comfort in it.”⁹¹

⁹⁰ Spencer also, unlike Darwin, perpetuated soft inheritance (the inheritance of acquired traits). Spencer, *The Principles of Biology*, 2:407–8.

⁹¹ Antin, *The Promised Land*, 262.

In *The Promised Land*, Darwinian evolution provides a model for reconsidering and re-conceptualizing change as Antin presents it throughout the majority of the book. Unlike Cahan's protagonist, Antin's use of Darwinism ultimately runs counter to common perceptions of evolutionary theory circumscribed through social Darwinism.⁹² Lori Jirousek has argued that Antin "strategically incorporate[es] the discourses of eugenics, evolution, and environmental reform," and she thereby "demonstrates the potential of informed minorities to resist or reshape dominant scientific or pseudo-scientific theories," even as "she also shows the constant danger of being subsumed by these theories."⁹³ Jirousek is most interested in the apparent tension in Antin's text between coexisting scientific theories of eugenics and environment—the latter of which played into a progressive reformist politics. Significantly, Darwin's gradualist evolutionary model complicates the apparent, starkly pro-assimilation message of Antin's book. The version of Darwinian thought that inspires Mary is mysterious rather than deterministic: it represents an unforeseeable future, as well as the ways in which the past exerts itself in the present. Therefore, in *The Promised Land*, Darwinian evolution provides a non-programmatic understanding of change—whether spiritual or material—which stands as an alternative to coercive assimilation. This is a model of Americanization that allows for variation in the present and unpredictability in the future.

⁹² There is significant debate about whether, and the degree to which, Social Darwinism can truly find its origins—in terms of tone and ideology—within Darwin's work. On the one hand, the popular sense of the term, "Social Darwinism," William Bynum writes, might really be called "Social Spencerianism." William Bynum, "Introduction," in *On the Origin of Species*, by Charles Darwin, 1 edition (Cambridge; London: Penguin Classics, 2009), xlv; On the other hand, as James Moore has argued, "Darwinism was 'social' from the start," and we should seriously investigate the impulse to untangle Darwin's scientific and social implications. qtd. Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists*, 278.

⁹³ Jirousek, "Mary Antin's Progressive Science," 63.

Evolutionary theory is therefore difficult to reconcile with the majority of the *Promised Land*, which offers a programmatic narrative of Americanization and assimilation. Critics who study Antin tend to emphasize the seemingly performative unreality of her immigrant narrative. Even her contemporary, Horace M. Kallen criticized her as a representative of self-styled exceptional immigrants, who represent their Americanization as “too self-conscious and self-centered, their ‘Americanization’ appears too much like an achievement, a *tour de force*, too little like a growth.”⁹⁴ For Kallen, Antin’s Americanization is too controlled, too boastful, too swift. Some might consider assimilation rather crudely on a sliding scale, as Hanna Wirth-Nesher points out, through which we ask, “how much Jewishness lost, how much Americanness absorbed.”⁹⁵ Yet even this is not stark enough for Antin’s narrative. As Michael P. Kramer has put it, “*The Promised Land* does not present hybridity as an option”⁹⁶—Antin emphasizes transformation rather than measured loss and absorption. In light of Antin’s rather relentless presentation of her completed, transformative immigrant trajectory, we must understand, as Sunny Yudkoff has argued, that “something *has been lost* in the creation of the autobiography.”⁹⁷ This can even be seen on the level of language, as the initial source material for the *Promised Land* consisted of letters that Antin wrote to her uncle in Yiddish, which were then translated to English and published as *From Plotzk to Boston* in 1899.

⁹⁴ Horace M. Kallen, “Democracy versus the Melting-Pot: A Study of American Ethnicity (1915),” in *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*, n.d., 75.

⁹⁵ Hana Wirth-Nesher, ed., *The Cambridge History of Jewish American Literature*, Jewish American Literature (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHO9781107261341>.

⁹⁶ Michael P. Kramer, “Assimilation in The Promised Land: Mary Antin and the Jewish Origins of the American Self,” *Prooftexts* 18, no. 2 (1998): 128.

⁹⁷ Sunny Yudkoff, “The Adolescent Self-Fashioning of Mary Antin,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 32, no. 1 (2013): 5.

Antin tips readers off to the craft of the autobiography in the more self-reflexive moments of justifying her role as autobiographer. In the book's famous first line, she writes, "I was born, I have lived, and I have been made over. Is it not time to write my life's story?" She then continues:

"I am just as much out of the way as if I were dead, for I am absolutely other than the person whose story I have to tell. Physical continuity with my earlier self is no disadvantage. I could speak in the third person and not feel that I was masquerading. I can analyze my subject, I can reveal everything; for *she*, and not *I*, is my real heroine. My life I have still to live; her life ended when mine began."⁹⁸

Antin thus explicitly constructs a separation between the author and the self that she narrates. She writes that she has been "made over" and "reborn" to such an extent that she can write her autobiography as though it were another's biography. The young Malinke/Mashka is another person, such that Antin can narrate *her* in the third person, and is even willing to forgo the crucial autobiographical *I*. In other words, there is no continuous essence throughout the text, or between the author and autobiographic subject. This at once shores up the narrator's objective stance toward the autobiographic subject at the beginning of the text and heightens the sense of total transformation in *The Promised Land*.

The transformation narrated in the text can also be understood within the convention of a conversion narrative—a conversion from the Jewish religion to the American civil religion. And yet, the new promised land, the Darwinian theory of evolution, resets Mary's position as one who has been converted or religiously redeemed. Describing how it felt to learn about evolution, she positions herself as Moses, who at the end of the Deuteronomy, does not enter the Land of Israel, but does see it from a mountaintop. Likewise, Mary does not grasp the theory in entirety, but "...the high peaks of the promised land of evolution did flash on my vision in the earlier

⁹⁸ Antin, *The Promised Land*, 1.

days...”⁹⁹ In this figuration, Mary presents the new “promised land of evolution” as a far-off, yet unreached spiritual height—she is no longer the confident, completely “made over,” assimilated American, which she claims to be in the introduction. This new promised land suggests not perfect transformation but anticipation of an ungraspable unknown.

Therefore, Darwinian theory provides an alternative perspective on the change narrated throughout the autobiography. Indeed, Antin draws direct comparison between immigration and learning about Darwinism. Of learning about natural history, she writes: “Vastly as my mind had stretched to embrace the idea of a great country, when I exchanged Polotsk for America, it was no such enlargement as I now experienced, when in place of the measurable earth, with its paltry tale of historic centuries, I was given the illimitable universe to contemplate, with the numberless aeons of infinite time.”¹⁰⁰ In this comparison, Antin rhetorically binds evolutionary thought to her immigration to America—her new and former “promised lands.” Evolution drives her to consider unquantifiable mystery. Unlike the seamless, discrete change presented in the earlier chapters, Antin is inspired by the incremental change over immeasurably long temporal ranges, described in gradualist evolutionary theories.

Antin describes the inspiration and intellectual growth afforded by Darwinism as both limitless and limited. She also refers to the “kaleidoscopic bits of stupendous panorama which is painted in the literature of Darwinism,” mystically combining two kinds of sight: the panoramic and the kaleidoscopic.¹⁰¹ A panorama allows a viewer to glimpse a wide scene, simultaneously. It is an artificial condensation and flattening—even if everything in a panorama exists

⁹⁹ Antin, 262.

¹⁰⁰ Antin, 258.

¹⁰¹ Antin, 258.

synchronically, it is typically impossible for the eye to capture the entire scene on its own. The kaleidoscope, on the other hand, provides a small view with a sequence of changing relations between different shapes, colors, and objects. These metaphors of sight remind us of the grand, sweeping nature of Darwinian theories, as well as its interest in mystery, surprise, and unpredictability. Antin thus shuttles between the gritty specifics of biological observation and the large philosophical affordances of the branch of knowledge: describing her fascination with the “microscopic perfection of a solitary blossom,” or the magnificence of the various creatures that make up a forest.¹⁰² When she describes, “the glimpse I caught, through this or that fragment of science, of the grand principles underlying the facts,” she continues to frame her insight as partial and magnificent.¹⁰³

Antin’s invocation of the “kaleidoscopic,” also echoes Darwin’s “entangled bank:” presenting a swarming, active, cooperative present. Wilson saliently notes the irony of describing one’s view of history as “kaleidoscopic.” After all, “Kaleidoscopes do not produce progress; they produce difference.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the invocation of a “kaleidoscopic view,” according to Wilson, suggests that Antin is making sense, not of her own history, or the national history, but of the contemporaneous variations she sees in the United States ethnic order.¹⁰⁵ I wish to complicate this slightly, because Darwin’s writings are indeed concerned with synchronous variation, and particularly with the ways that synchronic variation illustrates the relation between the past and the present. Therefore, Antin’s image of seeing kaleidoscopically and panoramically resonates

¹⁰² Antin, 259.

¹⁰³ Antin, 258.

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, “The Evolution of Ethnicity,” 253.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

with the temporal element of synchronic difference in Darwinism—that the present moment’s diversity is merely a phase in which laws of nature continue to unfold. Indeed, Darwin provides Antin not only a new lens to turn upon her own transformation; evolutionary theory might provide a viable option for narrating her present relation to a Jewish past.

Darwinist Approaches to Jewish History

While Antin and Cahan’s literary works stand out for their interest in Darwinist thought, they also fit into a wider context of Jewish thinkers grappling with the meaning of evolutionary theory. Like most other religious establishments, American Judaism initially rejected organic evolutionism, but by 1890s, Reform and traditionalist (which would become Conservative) Jews had mostly accepted it—and even came to use it as a theoretical resource to support their own stances on Judaism’s future.¹⁰⁶ So too, by the early twentieth century, there already existed a trans-Atlantic discourse that scientifically constructed the Jewish body as racial or pathological—a scientific discourse in which Jews and non-Jews both took part.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, Darwinism made way for a robust philo-Semitic counter-discourse, which Mitchel B. Hart has described as, “an interpretive tradition about Jews and Judaism,” that made use of a “Darwin-related vocabulary.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Marc Swetlitz, “American Jewish Responses to Darwin and Evolutionary Theory 1860-1890,” in *Disseminating Darwinism: The Role of Place, Race, Religion, and Gender*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and John Stenhouse (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 209–46, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

¹⁰⁷ Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

¹⁰⁸ It was merely “Darwin-related,” because many of the writers and thinkers who participated in this “counter-discourse” used the language of Darwin, even if their ideas often blended (or entirely tended toward) Lamarckian thought as well. Moreover, even as this phenomenon illustrates that Social Darwinist thought was ubiquitous, this ubiquity only included several key phrases like “struggle for existence” and “survival of the fittest.” In other words, the evolutionist expressions that Hart describes are quite easily identifiable as Spencerian, or “Social Darwinist.” Mitchell Bryan Hart, *The Healthy Jew: The Symbiosis of Judaism and Modern Medicine*, X, 264 S. (Cambridge [u.a.]: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 107, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

Within this context, many wished to demonstrate that Judaism was in particular alignment with eugenics. Jewish religious praxis and laws became the site for Darwinist interpretation, as racial thinkers presumed that Jewish legal prescriptions determined the biological makeup of the Jewish people.¹⁰⁹ In 1910 Francis Galton, the father of eugenics himself, told the editors of London's *Jewish Chronicle* that, "It may be said that from the days of Moses the Jews have been 'eugenisists' [*sic*]." ¹¹⁰ Likewise, the American eugenics movement leader G. Stanley Hall addressed Jewish audiences, gladly comparing the Jews' and the Yankees' (meaning White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) common "appreciation for eugenics, noted in the Bible."¹¹¹ Natural selection also provided a framework to understand Jewish *survival* amid Christian persecution in Europe.¹¹² For some Jewish intellectuals, this interpretive mode strategically reshaped an age-old question—how and why do the Jews survive?

Much like in earlier debates around Enlightenment and emancipation, this nineteenth-century interest in Jews' survival (and distinctiveness) focused on the experiences of oppression and the ghetto environment. Whereas the Enlightenment stance had held that oppression and ghettoization caused Jewish degeneracy, Social Darwinism allowed Jews to argue that the opposite was true: they concluded that oppression, the continual threat of violence, and the

¹⁰⁹ Hart, *The Healthy Jew*.

¹¹⁰ "Eugenics and the Jew: Interview for the Jewish Chronicle with Sir Francis Galton," *The Jewish Chronicle*, July 29, 1910.

¹¹¹ Hart, *The Healthy Jew*, 134.

¹¹² In the 1880s there was a debate in the American Hebrew about Jewish ritual, and about dietary restrictions in particular. The editors in favor of Jewish dietary laws not only argued that these rituals helped Jews to survive, in line with Spencer's "survival of the fittest." They also contended that such rituals, which make Jews distinct, contributed to their "racial purity." In this example, we see how Darwinism and evolutionism were not merely of interest because they might challenge or uphold central ideas and practices of Judaism. They also became a theoretical bridge that connected Jewish ritual to Jewish physiological and racial distinctiveness. Swetlitz, "American Jewish Responses to Darwin and Evolutionary Theory 1860-1890," 227.

ghetto environment all contributed to a process of natural selection.¹¹³ Viewing the ghetto as a blessing of biological inheritance was a radical reversal, marking not only a shift in viewing Jews as healthy rather than diseased, but also a shift in seeing the urban environment as one that could cultivate physical vigor over generations. This newer interpretive strand was not without its critics. In fact, the German Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz suggested that Jews' survival in spite of their weakness and vulnerability was the test case to *disprove* the cruel law of survival of the fittest (or what he called, "Might before Right").¹¹⁴ Crucially, both stances demonstrate a broad interest and investment in Social Darwinist concepts as potential keys for turning over long-standing questions about the status of Jews within majority Christian nations, and how to narrate Jewish history.

Even though prominent Jewish social scientists such as Franz Boas and Maurice Fishberg insisted that Jews were not a "pure race"—at the same time as Jews were commonly subjected to eugenicist studies and immigration policies—other Jewish thinkers participated in eugenics, or "Jewish racial thought" as well.¹¹⁵ The very existence of these two opposing approaches to the biological study of Jewishness reveals the deep ideological basis of this field. Hart sums up the double bind of these scientifically informed conceptions of Jews and Judaism as,

"A racialized medical discourse giveth and it taketh away. The Jews are healthy, and they owe this both to their religion and to their history; but they are also given over to mental illness, which their rituals are powerless to prevent. The Jews are white; they are no savage race. More than the other civilized races, they appear to be immune to the devastation of tuberculosis. Yet, again, they are a race apart, with their own 'racial particularities' that not even researchers into race and health have fully explained."¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Hart, *The Healthy Jew*, 6.

¹¹⁴ Heinrich Graetz, qtd. in Hart, 130.

¹¹⁵ John M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, xii, 255 p. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

¹¹⁶ Hart, *The Healthy Jew*, 135.

The two sides of this debate demonstrate the ability of any political view to bend knowledge, scientific or otherwise, into its own image. Nonetheless, at stake in scientifically-informed discourses of Jewish difference in Europe and the United States were questions that had been tossed around since the Enlightenment: questions of the bodily element of Jewish difference, of Jews' uncertain relationship to "Civilization" and "Culture," and of the degree of heritability of said nebulous Jewish difference.

Slanted Readings and Soft Inheritance

Like the aforementioned "Jewish racial thinkers," Antin and Cahan take advantage of evolutionary theories in order to imagine (and interrogate) a material presence of history within individual beings. Evolution explains how the individual exists only as the result of past events of the world. When Antin discusses history, inheritance, and self, she combines the theories of Lamarck, Spencer, and Darwin, to form "slanted readings." These allow her to reconcile a bodily Jewish inheritance with a universal one. Antin meditates on bodily inheritance in a scene in which Mary tries to break away from Jewish tradition: she is presented with ham and feels determined to eat this "unjewish meat," despite a great internal struggle. She writes, "I ate, but only a newly abnegated Jew can understand with what squirming, what protesting of the inner man, what exquisite abhorrence of myself."¹¹⁷ Antin describes a visceral reaction, through an image of her inner man's squirming, protesting body: a bodily agency that is both hers and not her own.

As she continues, she invokes the concept of recapitulation—the scientific theory that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, or that the individual's development reenacts the history of

¹¹⁷ Antin, *The Promised Land*, 250.

the species' and civilization's development. Earlier, Antin had written, "I have to recapitulate in my own experience all the slow steps of the progress of the race."¹¹⁸ Now, upon the un-Jewish meat, she reflects,

"And to think that so ridiculous a thing as a scrap of meat should be the symbol of something so august! To think that in the mental life of a half-grown child should be reflected the struggles and triumphs of ages! Over and over and over again I discover that I am a wonderful thing, being human; that I am the image of the universe, being myself; that I am the repository of all the wisdom in the world, being alive and sane at the beginning of the twentieth century. The heir of the ages am I, and all that has been is in me, and shall continue to be in my immortal self."¹¹⁹

Antin strikingly narrates the struggle with an inherited history—at once specifically Jewish and universal. Young Mary reenacts an age-old struggle for Jews to move beyond Judaism, tribalism, or particularism. She recapitulates a greater pattern of history, even though she is only a "half-grown child," who has not lived through this history directly, and does not understand its significance. When she calls herself "the heir of the ages," she also perpetuates the progressive, evolutionary idea that civilization's vast legacy has reached its apex, that, "we inherit the world at its pinnacle of development," as Beer describes it—and that this long history is housed within her.¹²⁰ In this moment of rejecting her habit of keeping kosher, the autobiography resolves the tension in scale, by relying on recapitulation more than Darwinism. She reiterates that her story has the power of synecdochal representation: her personal development reflects the development of not only Jews, but the entire human race. Yet of course, she is only able to recognize herself as an image of the universe, an heir of ages because of her visceral reaction to the piece of un-Jewish meat—that is, because her body had incorporated Jewish custom.

¹¹⁸ Antin, 108.

¹¹⁹ Antin, 197.

¹²⁰ Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, 18.

The Rise of David Levinsky, too addresses the issue of inherited Jewish history and soft inheritance, specifically through the novel's repeated interest in accents and gestures—or what Wirth-Nesher calls, “the body remembering.”¹²¹ Beyond the novel, gesticulations and embodied traits were key to nineteenth-century scientific inquiries into Jewish physical difference.¹²² Gesticulations, accent, and posture were central to the Lamarkian approach of “soft inheritance,” which argued that an individual's acquired traits can be passed onto their descendants. Gesticulations for David, much like Mary's “inner man,” stand as an embodied Jewish history. Throughout the novel, David is constantly observing and meditating on habits, mannerisms, and gesticulations—the movements that live in the body—as a key part of physical difference. He presents them as a sort of agency that is distinct from the self.

David's fellow traveling salesman, the Jewish, American-born Leob, ridicules David for his “Talmud gesticulations” or “yeshivah hand gestures,” reminding David that he displays the bodily mark of Eastern European Jewish culture. In the very same scene in which David discusses Spencerian and Darwinian theories in order to prove his rise, Leob taunts David over his lingering, unchanging outsider status, his embodied past. David recalls:

“One of the many things about which he often made fun of me was my Talmud gesticulations, a habit that worried me like a physical defect. It was so distressingly un-American. I struggled hard against it I had made efforts to speak with my hands in my pockets; I had devised other means for keeping them from participating in my speech. All to no avail. I still gesticulate a great deal, though much less than I used to.”¹²³

¹²¹ Hana Wirth-Nesher, *Call It English : The Languages of Jewish American Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 56.

¹²² Hana Wirth-Nesher and Hana Wirth-Nesher, *Call It English : The Languages of Jewish American Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 56.

¹²³ Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, 327.

Other scholars have noted the significance of David thinking of his hand gestures as a physical disability.¹²⁴ At another point David also describes not having been born in America as a “physical defect,” which “no surgeon in the world was capable of removing”¹²⁵; this supposed defect of being foreign-born “asserted itself in many disagreeable ways.”¹²⁶ The novel thus presents an alienated relationship between the self and the body’s habits— memories of the body, which seem to exert agency of their own.

Loeb’s teasing loudly asserts that no such gestures were passed down to him, yet it also suggests an anxiety that such mannerisms might lurk within. Later in the novel, Loeb jokes that David must never speak on the telephone, since he uses his hands as much as his voice when he speaks. David responds, upset that Loeb would make fun of a fellow Jew in front of gentiles. He asks Loeb, “aren’t you a Jew yourself?” to which Loeb replies, “Of course I am...and a good one, too. I am a member of a synagogue. But what has that got to do with it? I can speak on the telephone.”¹²⁷ Loeb distinguishes between the kind of Jew David is—one who was educated in an Eastern European yeshivah—and the kind that he is—one who is the member of a synagogue. He also makes clear that the gesticulations have nothing to do with any inherent essence of Jewishness; they are the embodiment of cultural background and lived experience.

While David feels that Loeb is “holding up our whole race to the ridicule of the gentiles,” Loeb is careful to separate himself from the object of his mockery.¹²⁸ Benjamin Schreier has written, regarding the usage of the word “race” within *David Levinsky*, that, “Certainly, ‘race’ as

¹²⁴ Sarah Wilson, “The Evolution of Ethnicity,” *ELH* 76, no. 1 (2009): 247–76.

¹²⁵ Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, 291.

¹²⁶ Cahan, 291.

¹²⁷ Cahan, 328.

¹²⁸ Cahan, 328.

it appears in the novel is far from being simply biological or otherwise deterministic; instead, the term displaces fundamental indeterminacy about what Jewishness—specifically American Jewishness—actually amounts to.”¹²⁹ This particular scene challenges the notion of a stable Jewish “race” to which both men automatically belong, or an inherited Jewish essence that they both share. In the distinction between Loeb and David, we are presented with bodies marked differently by experiences of Jewish text and practice—the Talmud and the synagogue. Through this recurring struggle over gesticulations, embodied Jewish history, and “race,” the novel points up the tension in scale of the ethno- vs. the auto- biography. These men’s interactions challenge the possibility of David’s ethnographic or even biological, representativeness.

Biological Americanization

These literary portrayals of Americanization as bodily and biological projects for the protagonists fit into a larger biologically inflected discourse in the immigration debates of the era. Often times, authors and politicians took population-level view, such as in the very same issue of *McClure’s* in which *David Levinsky* was first serialized. In an accompanying article by Burton J. Hendrick titled, “The Jewish Invasion of America,” the author (a notorious muckraker) writes, for instance, of Jews’ involvement in particular industries as “race displacement.”¹³⁰ Around the same time, authors debated the degree of physical change experienced by individuals upon immigration. Franz Boas famously studied a group of American-born children of Jewish immigrants who grew taller than their parents; for Boas this illustrated biological plasticity and adaptation to environment. The physical change served as proof that immigrants could adapt to

¹²⁹ Schreier, *The Impossible Jew*, 79.

¹³⁰ Hendrick, “The Jewish Invasion of America,” 140.

American life and did so.¹³¹ Boas and his school of anthropologists challenged his contemporaries who argued for static racial inheritance and the heritability of culture.

Political writers too debated what it meant to be a first- or second-generation American in the era of mass immigration. A number of Jewish American intellectuals used biological imagery and concepts of inheritance to write about the spiritual or cultural challenges of Americanization. In 1916 Edward Steiner wrote of the “hyphen” (that which distinguishes the “hyphenated American”),

“...like the lobes and glands and other now useless impedimenta which I, in common with other human beings, have inherited from my ancestors of varied species, who knew how to use them. That these useless parts may become inflamed and dangerous...the difficulty is not with the hyphen, but with the inflamed hyphen; and because it has become a somewhat contagious disease manifesting itself in different ways, I shall, after enumerate them, discuss the various remedies proposed...”¹³²

Whereas Theodore Roosevelt most famously characterized the “hyphen” as a divided loyalty, Steiner did not necessarily present it as ethically suspect. He did, however, stress that it is a potential danger. Rather than seeing the hyphenated identity as one burdened by contradiction, he saw it as a kind of latent bodily excess akin to the appendix: inconsequential in the present yet pulsing with connections to the past and future.

The American philosopher and champion of pluralism, Horace M. Kallen wrote of a similar anatomical excess in his 1924 essay, “Americanization.” He referred to “the present concretions of the vestigial past,” which were now irrelevant “imported behavior-patterns of the community life, with its memories, folkways, habits and traditions,” which get “dammed and

¹³¹ Maurice Fishberg, *The Jews: A Study of Race and Environment* (London ; New York: The Walter Scott publishing co., 1911): vii.

¹³² Edward Alfred Steiner, *The Confession of a Hyphenated American*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1916): 16–17.

frustrated,” and then flow “back into the organism and efforts recoil upon itself”¹³³ Figured as such, the past is a potent and material presence within the individual, but its significance, purpose, or consequence is ultimately mysterious to that very person in which these forces reside. For Kallen—like for Steiner, as well as Antin and Cahan—the environment causes the alienation between the individual and this embodied vestige of the past. While his writing is merely invoking an organic metaphor, his argument that history is an active and present force in any given moment also perpetuates Darwinian ideas of the laws of nature continually unfolding—whether in an entangled bank or on the banks of the United States.

Kallen was also one of the most well-known Progressive thinkers to give voice to the conflict between what Sollors calls “consent and descent,” or choice and nature, in American ethnicity.¹³⁴ Kallen himself placed these two things in opposition in the 1915 essay “Democracy Versus the Melting Pot,” wherein he emphasized the permanence of old-world legacies, even in spite of Americanization. Of the individual American, he wrote, “whatever else he changes, he cannot change his grandfather.”¹³⁵ Accordingly, Kallen presented a qualitative difference between the two identity markers on either side of the hyphen: being American is, “... acquired not inherited, and hence not transmitted,” and therefore, “each generation has to become ‘Americanized’ afresh...”¹³⁶ To Kallen, Americanness is continually in-process, and never guaranteed, while whatever is pre-American is not only heritable, but inescapable.

¹³³ Horace M. Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States; Studies in the Group Psychology of the American Peoples* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924), 215–16.

¹³⁴ Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*.

¹³⁵ Kallen, “Democracy versus the Melting-Pot: A Study of American Ethnicity (1915),” 75.

¹³⁶ Kallen, 78.

Ethnographic Detail in the Autobiographical Narrative

In *The Rise of David Levinsky*, David's father dies when he is a young child. He expresses that even as a child he understood the solemnity of death and memorial rituals for his father, because "There is a streak of sadness in the blood of my race. Very likely it is of Oriental origin. If it is, it has been amply nourished by centuries of persecution."¹³⁷ David attributes his sadness to geographic origin and inherited experiences, which live in "the blood of [his] race"—that is, to Lamarckian soft inheritance. Within the context of a life narrative, this explanation seems somewhat odd. Do centuries of persecution or Oriental origins really allow a child to understand the sadness of his father's untimely death? Why should David explain his personal experience of a significant life event as though it is simply an instantiation of racial characteristics acquired through inherited experience? While theories of inherited trauma have become increasingly accepted as of late, this instance illustrates the awkwardness of accounting for personal details and experiences through racial origins and generalizations. It points to the genre's struggle between the ethnographic and the autobiographic (even in fictionalized autobiography). If life's details and events could be explained by such general scientific facts, then why write (or read, for that matter) the story of a particular individual's life?

Indeed, I have argued throughout this chapter that the tension in scale for immigrant autobiography (representing both the exemplary individual and the example who "speaks for thousands") is amplified by these authors' choice to apply biological theories of evolution to the literary project of writing a single life. In order to use these theories to make meaning about an individual's life, we have to not only make a synecdochal leap of scale, we also need to question some of the assumptions about what an individual is, or how much an individual matters.

¹³⁷ Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, 4.

Evolutionary theory's insistence that the individual holds little significance seemingly undermines narratives of development in which we are asked to be utterly interested in the life of a single individual.

These overlapping and mutually intensifying tensions present a logical bind, in which pieces simply cannot line up: synecdoche will not always apply, nor will any theoretical apparatus or generic convention used to narrate a life. The affordances of autobiography, ethnography, and evolutionary theory are at once competing and compounding in both Cahan's and Antin's works. Yet these decidedly inconsistent schemas of the individual's relationship to history, the future, and the new nation are precisely what allow these works to create narratives that contest programmatic Americanization—albeit partially or imperfectly—through the biological imagination. For Antin especially, biological theories of evolution make space for dynamism rather than stasis, unpredictability rather than prescription. Within both texts, biology allows the protagonists to imagine a Jewish inheritance that resides in their bodies—precisely the parts of the Jewish past that they had willed themselves to dismiss, but could not. Thus, in presenting competing logics through the autobiographic genre and through biological theories of inheritance, the texts implicitly reveal the tenuousness of the sort of swift, agential assimilation that American culture had presented as a logical and civic necessity.

Antin's autobiography concludes with a proclamation of her relationship to history. She states, "No! It is not I that belong to the past, but the past that belongs to me...Mine is the whole majestic past, and mine is the shining future."¹³⁸ This is nothing if not self-aggrandizing. Yet it also might tell us something about how evolutionary thought allows Antin to reconcile her individual role in a history beyond her own lifespan. Antin negotiates between two things

¹³⁸ Antin, *The Promised Land*, 286.

violently at odds: the past and the future, or specifically between the Jewish immigrant past and her American present and future. Biology allows her to imagine that both reside within her. Rather than imagining that her past has a hold on her—whether in the form of her squirming inner man, or in David’s case, in the form of gesticulations and accent—she claims a hold on the past. Even if the past exerts itself within her body, its location there renders *her* its owner.

Chapter 3 “A Type That Produces”: Seeing Through Time in Jewish Photographic Types

In 1911, Maurice Fishberg, a Jewish American physician and physical anthropologist who emigrated to the United States from the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth century, described the paradox of his moment’s scientific conception of the Jewish racial type. In the tract, *The Jews: A Study of Race and Environment* (1911), Fishberg opens a chapter titled “Jewish Types” with the following contradiction: although on the one hand “all acknowledge that the Jewish type cannot be distinguished by separate physical traits such as stature, complexion, head-form, nose, etc.,” on the other hand, “it is nevertheless the prevailing opinion that the Jew’s physiognomy is typical, that his cast of countenance is uniform, and that one can pick out a Jew from among a thousand non-Jews without any difficulty.”¹³⁹ In this line, Fishberg provocatively sums up a seemingly impossible question: if there exist no known distinct Jewish physical traits, then why would so many people be confident that they could visually determine Jewishness?

In Fishberg’s moment, Jews’ racial status was viewed as a legitimate, yet unanswered scientific question. And typological thinking, which requires viewing all members of a classified group as “replicas of or deviations from” the type, provided a framework for determining a

¹³⁹ Such a statement might be surprising in the middle of a book recounting copious scientific findings on Jewish physical traits including those cited above, and illustrated with many photographs of various Jewish “types.” Some photographs’ captions include, “Russian Jewess, Mongoloid Type” (115), “Galician Jew, Ruthenian Type” (116), “Galician Jews, Negroid Types” (117). Fishberg, *The Jews*, 90.

biologically distinct Jewish group.¹⁴⁰ Yet Fishberg's observation invites further interrogation of a larger typological visual practice. What did these onlookers believe they saw when they saw a Jewish type?

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, many scientists and racial thinkers used photography to represent or create Jewish "types," which were often surprisingly *un*-interested in displaying specific "typical" physical features. Instead, across scientific and popular publications, the textual apparatuses around these photographic "Jewish types," instructed viewers in a visual practice of looking at Jews in order to see a transhistorical racial essence. Significantly, this discourse did not merely instruct viewers in how to look at Jews, it also described a special (essential) way that Jews themselves were able to see. These Jewish types were conceived, produced, and reproduced through the imbrication of the intellectual framework of biology with the visual technology of photography. Containing competing impulses to reproduce the real and to produce the ideal, they stood at the nexus of changing norms in turn-of-the-century scientific image making. Yet this paradox, too, fueled Jewish photographic types: the camera's authoritative ability to reproduce reality provided credence to the ostensible Jewish racial ideal, made visible in a photograph. This typological discourse established a racial visuality that drew the invisible into the realm of the visible.

Perhaps the most famous American theorization of race as rooted in a complex visuality remains W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of "second sight," in which the Black American is,

¹⁴⁰ Throughout the chapter, I also use the term typology over physiognomy or taxonomy, because of its meaning originating in the natural sciences as a form of classification according to general types. The word "typology" emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, originating in the natural sciences, and was taken up in such fields as archeology and linguistics, as well as in other social sciences Robert C. King, William D. Stansfield, and Pamela K. Mulligan, "Typological Thinking," in *Dictionary of Genetics*, Oxford Reference (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), <https://www-oxfordreference-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195307610.001.0001/acref-9780195307610-e-6703>.

“...born with a veil, and gifted with a second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is this peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”¹⁴¹

According to Du Bois, the Black American sees the world through a veil, and sees the self “through the eyes of the other.” Thus, visibility—looking and being looked at, or in some cases, being refused the right to look—initiates racial double consciousness.¹⁴² “Second sight” is the “gift” of knowing how the other sees and the ability to enact this sight one’s self; yet it is also the curse of always seeing the self in that way. As such, Du Bois theorizes that there can be a specific way of not only *seeing race*, but of seeing *as a race*. Most broadly, the concept of “second sight” offers a model of seeing race that is circular, iterative, and dynamic. Du Bois’s specific schema of a racial visibility is not directly analogous to what I track in this chapter. Nevertheless, the typological process of looking similarly establishes a layered, protracted visibility.

Indeed, despite the popular association of photographic “capture” with instantaneous apprehension, the typological process of seeing was necessarily durational and iterative. Jewish photographic types were established through the dynamic interplay of looking and being looked at, through the mental calculus of determining whether the individual “replicates or deviates from” the racial ideal, and through imagining history visibly manifest on a subject’s face. This form of visibility promised the ability to see *through* time, yet also took place *in* time. While I situate the Jewish typological discourse in the history of race science and scientific image making, we can even more specifically understand typology’s dynamic visual process as a

¹⁴¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 7.

¹⁴² David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois*, 33-4; and in *Next to the Color Line*, Hazel V. Carby, 254-5; Shawn Michelle Smith, 351

scientifically sanctioned method to systematize the chaotic sightlines found in the urban contexts in which these photographs all emerge. Such dynamism in these photographic sources can enrich our understanding of racialized visibility at the turn of the twentieth century, including (but not limited to) Du Bois's concept of "second sight." Together, these images and the visual practices surrounding them invite us to reconsider the temporality ascribed to race photography and racialized looking in this period. They also reveal how biology inflected this range of visual practices.

This is but one consequence of the chapter's inquiry into Jewish photographic types. I will map out the modes of looking brought about through the textual contexts in which these photographs circulated; I analyze the captions, scientific analyses, and ethnographic or narrative framing that informed how these photographs came to be read as types, and in turn came to propagate the racialized, biological determination of Jewishness. I trace the visual practice of creating Jewish photographic types back to the eugenicist Francis Galton in late nineteenth-century England. My analysis of Galton will lay the groundwork for understanding the biological and typological framing of the ethnographic photographs that accompanied the first serialized printing of Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* in 1913. The 1913 photographic types in turn deepen our understanding of the biological investments in Cahan's novel. They highlight the significance of racialized visibility in the biological imagination in Jewish American literature, and the mutual significance of literary, photographic, and scientific conceptions of "the type."

Further sources reveal photography and typological discourse's potential to obscure racial typological legibility, illustrating how the form can be used to either facilitate or frustrate a racialized gaze. Specifically, I compare a photo series that ran in the *Forverts* (*Jewish Daily*

Forward) in the 1920s and 30s called “*Tipn fun yidishe froyen* [Types of Jewish Women]”¹⁴³ to Du Bois’s photographic project called “Types of the American Negro” (1900)—which is notably not a project of *Jewish* photographic typology. However, Du Bois remarkably displays how photography and typological discourse can be manipulated in order to subvert the main claims of racial typology—namely racial homogeneity and stasis. At the same time as Du Bois was theorizing the racialized subject’s double consciousness, Jewish thinkers in the United States and Europe, such as Fishberg, Franz Boas, and Israel Zangwill were also working through their own understandings of how visual practices and typological discourse established Jews as a race. Visuality would frame their counter-discourse to race science and set its limits.

Placing the “Type” in the History of 19th-Century Scientific Images

The very notion of a “Jewish type,” rendered photographically, intersects with a tangle of changing scientific practices in the late nineteenth century. Physiognomy—the study of facial features and their relationship to character—was centuries-old by this point, and had been used for such varied pursuits as astrology, fortune-telling, etiquette, literature, and art.¹⁴⁴ Yet in the nineteenth century, both lay and expert practitioners worked to promote and re-make physiognomy as science.¹⁴⁵ The project to scientize physiognomy, according to Sharrona Pearl, “was not about redirecting the way people saw, but rather about systematizing and sanctioning what they were doing.”¹⁴⁶ And yet, the aims of this scientized physiognomy did transform over

¹⁴³ In cases such as this, in which the producers of the images are Jewish themselves, such a title might serve as sardonic mimicry, close to what Jose Esteban Muñoz would call “disidentification.” José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (U of Minnesota Press, 1999).

¹⁴⁴ Sharrona Pearl, *About Faces : Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 2.

¹⁴⁵ Pearl, 2.

¹⁴⁶ Pearl, 109.

the course of the nineteenth century—in no small part linked to the study of anthropology and the advent of photographic technology—from understanding the individual to describing group characteristics.¹⁴⁷ Physiognomy, by the late nineteenth century, was prominently used to distill and identify group types—whether these groups were distinguished by race, nationality, criminality, or sanity.¹⁴⁸ A photograph of a type as such would be read less for knowledge of the individual, and more for knowledge of the group it represents. The photographs of “Jewish types” examined in this chapter fall within this newer practice.

The nineteenth century also saw a change in what the very word “type” meant in the zoological, anatomical, and botanical fields, though move occurred in the opposite direction: “types” shifted from embodying the “ideal” to indicating the “characteristic,” or individual. For centuries prior, the typical had referred to the “*typus*” or the archetype, “rarely, if ever, embodied in a single individual.”¹⁴⁹ Yet in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—to the confusion of many practitioners—botanists came to rely on characteristic, “authentic” specimens (“holotypes”) over the ideal, “typical” specimens. Botanists called the new practice the “type method.”¹⁵⁰ This change, according to science historians Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, is a part of the nineteenth century’s corresponding shifts in epistemic virtues and in modes of scientific image-making. To briefly summarize their wide-ranging history of said shift: under the epistemic virtue practiced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, called “truth-to-nature,”

¹⁴⁷ Pearl, 211.

¹⁴⁸ Whereas physiognomy is not always racial (sometimes having to do with personality, sanity, or criminality), unless otherwise noted, my objects of study do not veer into this more capacious form of physiognomy. I generally use the term “typology” more often than “physiognomy” in this chapter to emphasize that I am looking at group, rather than individual, physiognomy.

¹⁴⁹ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 69.

¹⁵⁰ Daston and Galison, 110–11.

scientific images represented ideals, averaging out the oddities or imperfections found in specific items. In this mode, teams of artists and scientists established a way of seeing “past the surface” of objects “to underlying forms.”¹⁵¹ By contrast, under the subsequent epistemic virtue of mechanical objectivity, scientists aimed to avoid interpretation and idealization in their scientific images. In this mode, they used technologies such as photography, or worked to develop the discipline to see like a machine when drawing or observing nature.¹⁵² Thus, the paradigm in scientific image-making shifted from the drive to *produce* an image of the ideal, to the drive to *reproduce* the image of the characteristic or authentic. While this shift was not necessarily determined by the advent of photography, it was very much tied to it.

There is some friction between Pearl’s and Daston and Galison’s respective historical narratives regarding how photography may have influenced the meaning of the “type” in the late nineteenth century. Daston and Galison construct a particular narrative of the changing paradigms of the “type” (from the ideal to the characteristic). Yet Pearl’s narrative around the use of photography in order to represent group types (or using physiognomy to “describe the group”) challenges the notion of a tidy correlation between mechanical reproduction and the aim to represent the particular or individual.¹⁵³ In fact, photographic renderings of Jewish types from this period could be said precisely to strive to represent an *underlying form*—that is, race. Granted, Daston and Galison themselves note that these epistemic virtues do not perfectly replace one another, but rather “They accumulate into a repertoire of possible forms of

¹⁵¹ Daston and Galison, 60.

¹⁵² Daston and Galison, 140.

¹⁵³ Pearl, too challenges the extent to which nineteenth-century science was dominated by this drive for mechanical objectivity, and offers that even the scientized practice of physiognomy is instead best understood as a “shared subjectivity.” Pearl, *About Faces*, 5.

knowing”: a repertoire where these various techniques can influence and shape each other.¹⁵⁴ In that vein, this chapter’s various examples of photographic racial types, from Galton’s racial types created through composite photography to *McClure*’s photograph of the “pure type of an Arabian Jew,” attest the blurring between the competing impulses for what a scientific image ought to do: produce the ideal or reproduce the authentic. These photographic types, which borrow the drive for the ideal on the one hand, and the assurance of objective reproduction on the other hand, are the context in which seemingly antithetical scientific impulses get muddled.

For the purposes of this chapter, I generally use the term “type” or “racial type” to indicate an image of the ideal, the underlying form, or as Elizabeth Edwards’ calls it, the “abstract essence of human variation,” rather than an image of a “characteristic” individual.¹⁵⁵ This is simply in accordance with the sources I am analyzing, which are photographic and aim to represent racial, facial “types.” Significantly, when it comes to race, the “type” tends to mean the ideal embodiment, rather than a characteristic example. I also use the term “photographic type” to refer to photographs that have been captioned or deemed, “type,” such as “types of Jewish women,” or “an intellectual Russian Jew—a type that is found in large numbers in American universities.”¹⁵⁶ By referring to the images themselves, rather than their subjects, as *types*, I aim to emphasize the productive power of the photographs and their discursive framing, which are themselves expressions of the biological imagination. Of course, this won’t be the final word on the matter: the sources analyzed will continue to invite the question of *production* versus

¹⁵⁴ Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 113.

¹⁵⁵ qtd. Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line : W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 47.

¹⁵⁶ “Tipn Fun Yiddishe Froyen/Portrait Studies of Jewish Women,” *Forverts*, July 14, 1926; Hendrick, “The Jewish Invasion of America.”

reproduction. Photography—and the medium’s complex associations with reality and mechanical reproduction—crucially blurs the line between capturing and conjuring Jewish racial types.

Photography, Visuality, and Race

Visual scholars over the last several decades have illustrated how starting in the nineteenth century, photography played a significant role in nationalist projects and in creating a science of race. Since its inception, photography has been granted a special status as “indexical,” creating (and purporting to fulfill) a photographic pact that the photograph’s referent is real, or in the words of Roland Barthes, “that-has-been.”¹⁵⁷ Yet photography’s special relationship to reality is by no means inherent; rather, it has often been cultivated in institutional contexts and in its use by the state, for instance, to record and surveil criminality.¹⁵⁸ Within various national contexts, typological photographic projects served to establish distinctions between groups and create racial identities. Photography was adopted quickly in the 19th-century by anthropologists and incorporated as a tool for the study and ossification of race.¹⁵⁹ As Pearl notes, photography was heralded “as the redemptive technology of physiognomic claims,” even though, “the strength of photographs was precisely that they were not reproductions but productions made by photographers, who could and did emphasize physiognomically meaningful symbols.”¹⁶⁰ All the

¹⁵⁷ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, Reprint edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 77; Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 1st edition (New York: Picador, 2001).

¹⁵⁸ John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame : Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

¹⁵⁹ Elizabeth Edwards, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, and Elizabeth Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography, 1860-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Royal Anthropological Institute, London, 1992).

¹⁶⁰ Pearl, *About Faces*, 149.

same, “through photography,” as Edwards argues, “the ‘type,’ the abstract essence of human variation, was perceived to be an observable reality.”¹⁶¹ That is to say, the medium’s purported objectivity provided cover for the impulse to interpret or to represent an ideal or “underlying form”—an impulse conveyed in the texts that frame these photographic projects of racial types.

In addition to exemplifying a group’s defining physical characteristics, typological discourse promises that racial types draw the *invisible* to the surface of the visible. As with physiognomy, the logic of racial typology claims to find the internal evident in the external, the spiritual in the physical, and the group in the individual.¹⁶² The type’s purported power is precisely its ability to bring these opposing elements together, and to paradoxically represent one through the other. If photographic typology can ostensibly make abstract racial essence into an observable reality, then this claim also seems to collapse the distinction between the invisible and the visible, while at the same time relying on the very distinction in order to bolster typology’s representational claims.

As we will come to see, photographic typological projects such as Galton’s simultaneously uphold visibility as the epistemological holy grail of race, while also placing significant pressures on the medium’s own premise—and promise—of representation. On the one hand, it has been established by scholars over the last several decades that visibility and the power of looking have served as the grounds of racial difference in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While Du Bois theorized racial consciousness visually in 1903 as “second sight,” still to this day, as Shawn Michelle Smith has argued, “Race is conceived not simply

¹⁶¹ qtd. Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 47.

¹⁶² Amos Morris-Reich describes the tensions between these dichotomies as inherent to the use of the photographic medium in racial anthropology Amos Morris-Reich, *Race and Photography : Racial Photography as Scientific Evidence, 1876-1980* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), XX.

through representation but also through acts of looking...racial identification and recognition are negotiated through, and even instigated by, racialized gazes in a racist culture.”¹⁶³ On the other hand, even if from today’s vantage point, we understand that visibility is key to the *construction* of race, this does not mean that it has in fact been the key to the exposure of racial essence, as these historical racial thinkers and photographers would contend. The 19th-century emergence of racial photography was bound up with contradictions, including what historian Amos Morris-Reich calls “the tension between the belief in self-evident racial difference and its actual social elusiveness.”¹⁶⁴ Indeed, the racialized gaze’s historical and epistemological significance is not equivalent to the ontological self-evidence of race.

Yet these two concepts are difficult to disentangle, precisely because they were established as logical corollaries. Many scholars have argued that a reliance on visibility—in other words, on features perceptible to the eye—has gone hand-in hand with the development of the concept of race as an intractable, ontological bodily difference, as opposed to race as malleable and contingent.¹⁶⁵ By the end of the nineteenth century, race was conceived, according to George W. Stocking Jr., as “the permanent inherited physical differences which distinguish human groups.”¹⁶⁶ Race, once considered a fluid, flexible category (the result of climate or culture), became known as a defining, stable characteristic of the body. Yet of course a conceptualization of race as permanent and visible relies, as Robyn Wiegman notes, “on a series

¹⁶³ Morris-Reich, 11.

¹⁶⁴ Morris-Reich, 11.

¹⁶⁵ Rusert, *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture*, 74.

¹⁶⁶ George W. Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution; Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 30.

of bodily fictions assumed to unproblematically reflect the natural meaning of flesh.”¹⁶⁷ It would seem, then, that the “realness” of race became tied to its visible status as well as to its purported permanence.

If the promise that race is visible is so closely entwined with the idea that it is also permanent, then the claim of *seeing race* turns easily into *seeing permanence*—which is to say, seeing across time. This very notion feeds into one of the most significant aspects of Jewish photographic typology: its claim to represent long temporal scopes or to access distant history. The typological process of looking supposedly allows viewers to observe distant history by looking at a photographic type. The claim of seeing a racial history manifest in an individual’s face is by no means unique to Jewish types. However, Jewish physical ambiguity dials up its significance. In the absence of consistent physical traits, the notion of a visible history became especially pronounced in discussions of Jewish racial typology and has even at times overshadowed phenotypic descriptions in typological discourse. In this manner, photographic typology fits within a broader project, which I trace throughout this dissertation, of imagining a bodily Jewish inheritance or access to Jewish history through biological knowledge.

This idea of the photographic type as a representation of long or distant history might seem rather surprising. After all, the photographic medium is often associated with brief temporality (even instantaneity). However, Jewish photographic types, such as those created by English scientist Francis Galton, were hailed in their time for a unique ability to access, or represent, a distant history. Moreover, the pedagogical function of typological discourse made this mode of looking possible for individuals on a wider scale. Sara Blair has called this concept,

¹⁶⁷ Robyn. Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender*, New Americanists viii, 267 p. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 21, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

“arrest:” a mode of seeing, which “borrow[s] a transcriptional agency from the operations of the camera” and allows Jews (or any Other) to be seen as fundamentally outside of modernity and temporality.¹⁶⁸ Citing William Dean Howells, who wrote in 1896 that, “Splendid types of that old Hebrew world” are visible on the busy streets of the Lower East Side, Blair argues that this visual practice effectively “relegate[es] its inhabitants to a static, typological past.”¹⁶⁹ Blair emphasizes arrest, but I would point out that there is also another form of temporal manipulation at work in this layered visual practice. Not only are the inhabitants relegated to the past, but Howells’ mode of seeing (which Blair describes as “photographic”) purportedly allows him to see into the past: he imagines himself able to access the ancient world through looking at those he calls Jewish “types.” However paradoxical, scientific practices and the modern technology of photography inform this typological mode of seeing the Jew as static—as a type. Yet such is precisely the power of typological visibility—to see through time by imagining that the racial type is constant throughout history. Imbedded within this concept of arrest lies a protracted, dynamic process, which unsettles the notion of photography’s momentary visibility.

As we will see in the first example (the composite photographs of Francis Galton), I argue that typological discourse is deeply invested in temporality in these cases, precisely because of the ambiguity of Jewish physical distinctiveness. This encompasses the tendency of some race scientists to incorporate an older anti-Semitic notion of an appraising or alchemical Jewish gaze into their descriptions of Jewish types. They instruct viewers to engage in a sustained process of looking and being looked at, a typological process which unfolds *in* time,

¹⁶⁸ Sara Blair, *How the Other Half Looks : The Lower East Side and the Afterlives of Images* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 13.

¹⁶⁹ Howells qtd. Blair, 13.

even as many Jewish photographic types also promise to access ancient history or condense longer periods of time.

Galton and Jacobs: Creating Composite Photographic Types

The English eugenicist Francis Galton's late nineteenth-century composite photographs stand as the most prominent project of Jewish photographic typology. I begin my study of Jewish photographic types with Galton, not only for chronological reasons, but also because his ghost-like photographic images are so explicitly, methodically, *produced*. Galton often figures significantly in scholarly accounts of racial photography, racial types, and physiognomy (including accounts such as mine, which focus on the United States). However, full attention is not always paid to these images' specificity as Jewish typological images, nor to the question of how they might relate to other typological images of Jewish subjects in the United States. Galton's images might exemplify what we think of as "photographic types," in that they were explicitly racial, and interpreted for clues to illuminate a trans-historical racial essence. These Jewish photographic types came about after Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin, and known in his day as the "father of eugenics," developed some of the first statistical methods for studying inheritance. Notably, Galton first used his composite photography method to produce "types" of criminals and consumptives, meaning that from the beginning, his was a project of negative visibility. In these images, which he also called "pictorial statistics," Galton created a new photographic technology that would blend multiple photographs and help discern an underlying—not initially visible—type among a group of individuals. Galton created the composite images by exposing multiple photographic images on top of each other for an equal, brief period of time—as a result, commonalities would become increasingly opaque and visible,

and variations from the central form would fade away.¹⁷⁰ The composite type, no doubt, also falls outside of the photographic pact, or the promise of, “that-has-been,” which Barthes has described as inherent in the photographic form, because these images portray faces that have never existed. Galton’s images were self-consciously typological *productions*, rendered through photographic technology.



Figure 1 Francis Galton, *Composite Portrait of the “Jewish Type,”* 1885

Galton understood his process of distinguishing core, common features to be capable of revealing the underlying form—the pure, ahistorical “type”—from which all individuals deviate.¹⁷¹ Allan Sekula has called Galton’s composite images a merging of “the desire to look”

¹⁷⁰ Francis Galton, “Photographic Composites,” *The Photographic News*, April 17, 1885, 244–45.

¹⁷¹ Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* (London: Macmillan and co., 1883), 10.

and “the desire to measure.”¹⁷² Galton’s method was indeed mechanical, but it was a method of mechanically *averaging* and *idealizing*. He was driven to determine underlying, essential truths about a group, yet believed the best means to do so was through mechanical production. Daston and Galison write that on the one hand, he “aimed at an ideal type that lay ‘behind’ any single individual;” on the other hand, he sought the “ideal not with what he and others had come to see as subjective idealization (stemming from ‘biases,’ ‘fancies,’ and ‘judgment’) but with the quasi-automated procedures of mechanical objectivity.”¹⁷³ His photographic typological process is, therefore, a combination of “truth-to-nature” and “mechanical objectivity,” a limit case for the supposed incompatibility of these epistemic virtues and scientific image-making practices.

Galton came to create his Jewish composite types only at the urging of English Jewish social scientist, Joseph Jacobs. Jacobs’ intention for Galton’s type was to represent a singular condensation of racial features. The type created in these composite photographs would be homogenizing, essential, and ideal. Yet these photographic types were more of an experiment than we might imagine: the purpose was to answer the question, *is there a Jewish type?* To begin, Galton visited a Jewish boys’ school in London and captured photographs of multiple students, facing the camera and in profile, which he then exposed on top of each other in order to create the composite images. Ultimately, Jacobs read the images as affirming a Jewish type. Beyond the opinions of Jacobs and Galton, this photographic endeavor and the resulting images were hailed as a great achievement, a racial type which proved that racial types existed at all.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Allan Sekula, “The Body and The Archive,” in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 367.

¹⁷³ Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 169.

¹⁷⁴ Daniel Akiva Novak, *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture ; 60 (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 33.

Yet Galton himself, while impressed with his visual creation, did not believe that they proved that the Jews were a pure race.

In making these images, the decision to represent Jewish males was deliberate, as Galton wrote that he did not believe that making a type of Jewish women would be possible, because they exhibited too much physical variation.¹⁷⁵ Whatever the scientific basis for this judgement that only Jewish males could be typical, it also happens to echo the trend in Victorian caricature of representing the image of the Jew as always male (and always Ashkenazi).¹⁷⁶ In England and beyond, the typical or stereotypical construction of the Jewish body is almost always male.¹⁷⁷ However, Galton's notion that a Jewish *female* type is impossible edges close to an admission that there is, more generally, ambiguity around Jewish physical distinctiveness. Moreover, by photographing boys, Galton does not capture characteristically masculine facial features such as beards, which are often associated with Jewish men (variation in facial hair among photographic subjects might also have caused a problem for the composites). Consequently, the images of immature male faces, labeled the "Jewish type," contribute to a relatively common, feminized conception of Jewish masculinity. Galton's specific selection of photographic subjects (not female, not mature, etc.), can be understood, then, as a failsafe against the implicit problem of Jewish physical variation.

Regardless of whether or not Galton interpreted the composite images as "pure types," he and Jacobs both interpreted the images for their power to condense time. In particular, Galton evaluated their aesthetic or mimetic value in regard to their ability to represent an extended

¹⁷⁵ Galton, "Photographic Composites," 269.

¹⁷⁶ Pearl, *About Faces*, 128.

¹⁷⁷ Gilman, *The Jew's Body*.

timeframe. Galton compares his composite portraits to the “ideal pictures of the great masters” and suggests that his composite portraits of the Jewish type approach painting’s quality in a way that a standard photograph cannot.¹⁷⁸ He writes, “Perhaps the most real difference between a photographic portrait and a good painting is that the former is merely an exact representation of one phase of a sitter’s individuality, while the latter may be a composite of an indefinite number of phases.”¹⁷⁹ So then, the great difference between a photograph and a painting is the temporal breadth represented in the single image. Even though a composite portrait includes many individuals’ visages, captured photographically, Galton proposes an equivalence between this multitude of faces and multiple phases. With this stated condensing of time, these images constitute what Sekula calls a “collapsed archive,” an ability to know a great deal simply by giving a presumably quick look.¹⁸⁰ The collapse or condensation, Galton attests, corrects for what is otherwise a shortcoming in photographic representation; he extends the image’s indexicality, by multiplying the moments that a photograph can represent. Galton thus articulates the formal, aesthetic power of the composite photograph—and the formal requirement of a photographic type—an ability to represent an extended period of time.

The composite portraits of the Jewish type enact a different alchemy of temporal representation for Jacobs. In a sense, photographs, as Alan Trachtenberg has suggested, always perform their own kind of alchemy when they “confer value through metamorphosis; to take a picture of some thing or person is to turn what the eye sees into a tangible image, an object of

¹⁷⁸ Galton, “Photographic Composites,” 248.

¹⁷⁹ Galton, 248.

¹⁸⁰ Sekula, “The Body and The Archive,” 372.

new value.”¹⁸¹ Yet Jacobs believed these images to be “pure types,” meaning that they show the Jewish facial features passed down in their pure form throughout generations. Galton’s type is meant to represent a singular condensation of racial features. By collapsing many images into one, Jacobs purports that the photograph enacts a kind of metamorphosis different from what Galton described: he saw Galton take many images of the “Modern Jew” and create an image of the “Ancient Jew.”

To wit, Jacobs suggests that this image might allow the *viewer* to move through time. In their written interpretations of the images, both Jacobs and Galton often mention the “type of the Modern Jew” in their writings, as though to suggest that the “Modern Jew” might be distinct from the “ancient Jewish type.”¹⁸² Jacobs especially cites the Hebrew Bible and the Mishnah, as well as Assyrian bas reliefs in his writing, seeking evidence to connect the composite images with written descriptions or images from the past.¹⁸³ At the time, this was a common practice in anthropology, phrenology, and archeology, used to ascertain what the ancient Hebrews looked like. Yet Jacobs expresses his awe for this photographic technology, which allows the viewer to see history in a novel way,

“...the photographic lens seems, in these composites to traverse the aeons of time and bring up into visible presentment the heroes of the past. In these Jewish composites we have the nearest representation we can hope to possess of the lad Samuel as he ministered before the Ark, or the youthful David when he tended his father’s sheep.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Alan Trachtenberg, “The Claim of a Jewish Eye,” *Pakn Treger*, Spring 2003, 22.

¹⁸² As Julian Levinson has written of turn-of-the-20th-century American writers as well, often there were imagined to be “two Jews:” the biblical, spiritual, classical Jew, and the real-life, uncouth modern Jews. Galton’s writing very much relies on this distinction. Julian. Levinson, *Exiles on Main Street: Jewish American Writers and American Literary Culture*, Jewish Literature and Culture x, 239 p. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 22–25, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

¹⁸³ Joseph Jacobs, *Studies in Jewish Statistics : Social, Vital and Anthropometric* (London: D. Nutt, 1891), xvii.

¹⁸⁴ Joseph Jacobs, “The Jewish Type and Galton’s Composite Photographs,” *The Photographic News*, April 24, 1885, 269.

In other words, according to Jacobs, the composite photograph allows viewers to see how the past is present in the modern Jewish type. By “traversing the aeons of time,” these images collapse the distance between the past and the present. The camera lens, according to Jacobs, has conjured into photographic realness, a character from the past, whose trace could never have touched the camera lens. Like Galton, Jacobs suggests that the composite photographic type of the Jew manipulates time, by rendering a history visible and present. Yet the idea that the camera lens should “traverse the aeons of time,” I argue, further constitutes a typological process insofar as it describes looking—performed by the camera lens and by the viewer of the photograph—as not only contracted but also *protracted*. Even as this process allows one to see the past and present touch, it also must take place *in time*, aided by the scientists’ discursive framing.

Constructing a Jewish Gaze

One crucial site for these scientists’ framing of images as types was the construct of the Jewish gaze. Here, scientists could instruct readers in a cycle of looking and *being looked at*, which would allow viewers to identify and create Jewish photographic types. Jacobs instructs readers to assess Galton’s composite photographs feature by feature, ultimately telling them to, “Cover up every part of composite A but the eyes, and...I fancy anyone familiar with Jews would say, ‘Those are Jewish eyes.’”¹⁸⁵ Galton and Jacobs—along with many other racial thinkers around the turn of the twentieth century—produced Jewish types not only by gazing *at*

¹⁸⁵ Jacobs, 268. Jacobs invites viewers to do the same for the Jewish nose. He instructs viewers to cover the profile of the face with a piece of paper, to see that the “Jewish expression disappears” without the nose in profile (Jacobs, 268). This, according to Jacobs, proves that what distinguishes the Jewish nose is not its length (which would have been seen from the front), but what he calls, “nostrility.” He then invites them to perform a similar experiment with a (now iconic) series of three pen drawings of noses in profile. Here, in order to verify the scientific truth of the photographs, he invokes their closeness to cartoons. After presenting the caricature “6” nose, he narrates to the readers, “now remove the twist” from the first drawing, “and much of the Jewishness disappears; and it vanishes entirely when we draw the continuation horizontally...” (268). Jacobs frames the experience of viewing the cartoon noses as a sequence or an experiment that the viewers can reproduce—such reproducibility lends scientific rigor.

Jews, but also by constructing a notion of a particular Jewish gaze. In many typological projects the subject's gaze promised a different, though also crucial, representational power: It became a locus for the coordination of internal and external characteristics. Jacobs took the Jewish gaze for granted, writing, "Most people can tell a Jew when they see one, there is a certain expression in a Jewish face which causes them to be identified as such in almost every instance."¹⁸⁶ As Sander Gilman has written about Galton and Jacobs' project, Jacobs found "the absolute Jewishness of the gaze" in Galton's images.¹⁸⁷

Yet they were by no means alone in this insistence on the Jewish gaze, or in emphasizing the notion of a Jewish expression more generally. When Fishberg describes artistic renderings of the Jewish face, he pays attention not only to discrete facial features—eyes, forehead, nose, lips—but also "the expression in the dark eyes," which he writes "is very difficult to describe."¹⁸⁸ Even Fishberg, who ardently opposes the notion of the Jewish type, writes that in the Jewish gaze, "There is a suggestion of what [American economist William] Ripley calls a suppressed cunningness."¹⁸⁹ Another English biologist, Redcliffe N. Salaman claimed to find in subjects of mixed descent a particular Jewish gaze or facial expression and, crucially, used photographs as evidence of this.¹⁹⁰ The Jewish gaze was even more central to the work of Russian-born German gynecologist and anthropologist Carl Heinrich Stratz, who wrote that a particular Jewish gaze, rather than any measurable physical characteristics, distinguished the Jewish type. Stratz used photographs to study and display this Jewish gaze and to identify "true" Jewish descendants all

¹⁸⁶ Jacobs, 268.

¹⁸⁷ Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, 68.

¹⁸⁸ Fishberg, *The Jews*, 97.

¹⁸⁹ Fishberg, 97.

¹⁹⁰ Morris-Reich, *Race and Photography*, 71.

over the world; his subjects included Jewish women from Palestine, as well as women from many other regions, such as Japan, who otherwise would not identify as Jewish, but who nonetheless displayed a Jewish facial expression.¹⁹¹ It is no coincidence that for Salaman and Stratz, like Galton and Jacobs, the visual technology of photography became the medium to express and substantiate their theories about the Jewish gaze. They, too, used the camera's reputation for mechanical reproduction to substantiate these racial ideals.

Galton for his part made detailed observations about the gazes of his artificial Jewish photographic subjects, as well as the gazes of the Jewish people he saw in the London neighborhood where he took the boys' photographs. He recalled,

"The feature that struck me most, as I drove through the adjacent Jewish quarter, was the cold scanning gaze of man, woman, and child, and this was no less conspicuous among the schoolboys. There was no sign of diffidence in any way of their looks, nor of surprise at the unwanted intrusion. I felt, rightly or wrongly, that every one of them was coolly appraising me at market value, without the slightest interest of any other kind."¹⁹²

Galton assesses the Jewish inhabitants of the London neighborhood much in the same way that Blair describes William Dean Howells and other observers of New York's Lower East Side having done: they all take a photographic approach in order to see inhabitants typologically, as static remnants of the past. In the Jewish gaze, Galton locates the Jewish propensity for commerce, which he identifies as their racial essence, their underlying form. Therefore, the discourse of the Jewish gaze allows Galton to render an anti-Semitic stereotype visible and manifest in Jewish bodies for him to see. He also emphasizes that the cycle of looking and being looked at takes place both within the confines of the photographic encounter and when he is out on the street. This circular gazing process is not limited to the photograph, but instead informs

¹⁹¹ Morris-Reich, 67.

¹⁹² Galton, "Photographic Composites," 243.

his other visual encounters. It naturalizes both the typological concept of the Jewish gaze and the typological mode of looking at Jews.

The construct of the Jewish gaze has a long history, and like physiognomy writ large, was standardized and scientized through racial discourse. For centuries, Christians in Europe imagined that Jews were uniquely able to discern what is valuable. Through this association, the “Jew’s eye” came to mean something high in value. As Trachtenberg has mused upon the circular logic of this phrase, “What has value in ‘a Jew’s eye’ is value itself, the transformation of things through the alchemy of finance and commerce into ‘worth.’”¹⁹³ Later, as Gilman notes, racial thinkers who located racial essence in the Jewish gaze or Jewish eyes claimed to find visible evidence of Jewish psychological pathology there.¹⁹⁴ If physiognomy posits a relationship between facial features and character, the manner in which one uses or conducts the face makes this relationship visible. The ephemeral gaze, unlike more concrete or measurable facial features, straddles the border between internal and external characteristics, between the physical and the spiritual. Therefore, the discourse of the gaze grants leeway in constructing racial typology where visual ambiguity persists: if one cannot easily or consistently identify particular physical traits on racialized bodies, Jewish or otherwise, then the gaze could stand as an essentially Jewish feature available for the camera and the eye to capture. Typologists’ interest in the Jewish gaze points to a key ambivalence in photographic typology and the typological process regarding the value of the visible and the material.

¹⁹³ The expression, “Jew’s eye [*Jewess’ eye*]” meaning something highly valuable, derives from Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*.
<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780199829941.001.0001/acref-9780199829941-e-25564?rskey=qcA1E9&result=1#>

¹⁹⁴ Gilman, *The Jew’s Body*, 68–69.

Photographic Types in and Around Literature

Understanding photographic types and the layered visual practice that attend them thus invites us to reconsider a text at the center of the previous chapter: *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1915) by Abraham Cahan. Readers may recall that Cahan's fictional character David Levinsky was first presented to readers in *McClures* magazine as "in fact, an actual type."¹⁹⁵ In the same issue, an article by the muckraking journalist Burton J. Hendrick, titled "The Jewish Invasion of America," was published with an array of photographic images, which were also described as "types." Significantly, only the first five illustrations in the article are photographs, and all subsequent images, also of subjects' faces, are sketched drawings (presumably due to cost). All but one of the photographs' captions use the word "type," as does one drawing, which labels its subject a "typical push-cart peddler."¹⁹⁶ However, unlike the character David's status as a singular, representative, Jewish type, these images of Jewish immigrants published in *McClure's* within "The Jewish Invasion of America" suggest a proliferation of Jewish types. The diverse array of Jewish immigrants displayed are labeled as arrivals from Italy, Bulgaria, Jerusalem, Kiev, and Galicia. This very variety of illustrations presents a challenge for a single cohesive reading of them.

Nevertheless, the textual apparatus around the images (the ethnographic article and the photographs' captions) imbed the images in a typological discourse. The photograph on the first page frames all that follow as racial photographic types. This photograph shows a teenage boy in three-quarter view, wearing a collarless shirt and a tall pointed fur hat. He is described in the

¹⁹⁵ Cahan, "The Autobiography of An American Jew: The Rise of David Levinsky," 92.

¹⁹⁶ Hendrick, "The Jewish Invasion of America," 139.

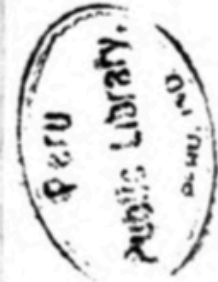
caption as, “a pure type of the Arabian Jew.”¹⁹⁷ The image is cropped in such a way that the top of the boy’s head juts beyond the photograph’s brick-wall background and onto the page. His hat is placed in between the author’s first and last names, visually enacting an invasion of its own. Together, the boy’s apparently non-Western dress, his identification as an Arabian Jew who emigrated from Jerusalem, and his description as a “pure type” frame him racially, and tinge Hendrick’s article from the outset as a story of Oriental others descending upon the United States. Most significantly, the term “pure type” borrows directly from the biological language of racial typology, meaning one who descends from an isolated or not “admixed” group. Therefore, even if the photographs themselves challenge the idea of a single “Jewish type” in their very plurality, their textual framing activates the language of racial typology. This framing casts a shade of race science over the idea of a Jewish “invasion,” in effect heightening the nativist anxiety coursing through the article, and perhaps in Cahan’s story as well.

¹⁹⁷ Hendrick, 125.

THE JEWISH INVASION OF AMERICA

BY BURTON

J. HENDRICK



A PURE TYPE OF ARABIAN JEW. THIS BOY OF EIGHTEEN, A TAILOR BY TRADE, TRAVELED ALONE TO THIS COUNTRY FROM JERUSALEM. HE ARRIVED HERE DECEMBER 28, 1912

Figure 2 First Page of McClure's Article, "Jewish Invasion of American," April 1913

Understanding how Hendrick introduces the literary type (David) can inform our reading of these photographic types. Here too, as in Galton's photographic type, the Jewish literary type mixes the opposing drives to reproduce and to idealize—though, through different methods. In this issue, *McClure's* frames Cahan's fictional tale as an "autobiography," at the same time as Hendrick describes the character as *in fact, an actual type*. Such an association between the real and the type chafes against the common literary meaning of "type" as in an *archetype* or

stereotype, or alternately as “a symbol for someone or something.”¹⁹⁸ Nonetheless, the magazine’s prologue to Cahan’s story calls David, the type, “more sensational than could be conjured up by any man’s imagination.”¹⁹⁹ By emphasizing the reproduction of the real, *McClure’s* teaches readers to view Cahan’s character as a type according to prevailing scientific norms, rather than literary norms.

Accordingly, Hendrick’s description of David as a type shares much in common with the epistemological tension of photographic types. This is especially resonant when Hendrick purports that Cahan’s realist fiction demonstrates, “by concrete example, the minute workings of that wonderful machine, the Jewish brain.”²⁰⁰ On the one hand, Hendrick’s description of David as a type and as a concrete example is informed by the value of mechanical objectivity (especially as it relates to the effort to reproduce nature, or the real, which was a key component in realist literature). On the other hand, his valorization of the type is also informed by the seemingly opposed drive to present David as an ideal representative of a racial essence—through whom we can peek at “that wonderful machine, the Jewish brain.” By portraying David, rather than the author, as a machine, Hendrick assures readers of his reproducibility. Hendrick, *unlike* Galton, promotes the Jewish type—both literary and photographic—as captured, rather than created, reproduced rather than produced. Yet, of course, the emphatically fictional status of Cahan’s story—as well as our previous examples of photographic types—should orient us to see all of these literary and photographic types as constructed, as produced, especially in their claims of providing access to a historically static racial essence.

¹⁹⁸ “Typology, n.,” in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, June 2020), www.oed.com/view/Entry/208394.

¹⁹⁹ Cahan, “The Autobiography of An American Jew: The Rise of David Levinsky,” 92.

²⁰⁰ Hendrick, “The Jewish Invasion of America,” 165.

Within the article, the photographs' captions naturalize the mode of looking that allows viewers to see the photographs as types. One of the article's largest images is a photographic portrait in profile of a Washington Census Bureau employee who is called, "An intellectual Russian Jew—a type that is found in large numbers in American universities."²⁰¹ The claim that a type is "found in large numbers" suggests that these "types" preexist photographic reproduction. The caption conveys ubiquity and reproducibility, such that seeing this photograph allows viewers to envision the group of individuals that the man represents. The description, then, implicitly invites the audience to enact such typological interpretation upon the "large numbers" of these individuals, whom they might find outside the pages of *McClure's*, and to assess whether they conform to or deviate from the published image. In other words, these captions instruct readers in a typological process that can be applied to both photographs and people. This is a visual process that conceals itself in its claim of reproducing the real.

²⁰¹ Hendrick, 126. Another photograph portrays an eighteen year-old rabbinical student, whom McClures calls, "a representative type of the intellectual young Jewish immigrant" (128).



Figure 3 Image of Census Bureau Worker from McClures, April 1913

The seams of this visual practice show a bit more in another photograph and caption which also teach viewers to see typologically. This photograph shows a newly arrived eleven-year-old Hungarian Jewish girl, “A type that produces many New York school-mistresses.”²⁰² Consistent with my interpretation of the previous photographs, this caption unambiguously points to the type’s existence outside the bounds of the photograph. Yet more striking in this instance is the fact that the caption suggests not only that the “type” precedes the photographic image, but also that her status as a type precedes the fulfillment of her typical occupation—or possibly even predetermines her future action. Those who look at this image of a girl can thus see not only her peers who might “replicate or deviate from” her type, but also can ostensibly see

²⁰² Hendrick, 127.

her future (as well as that of her peers). Related to a more common claim that Jewish *history* is evinced on the face of a Jewish type, this caption—by claiming that the type “produces many school mistresses”—also offers the ability to access a diachronic temporality. Moreover, the idea that we can foretell the girl’s future is surprisingly similar to the idea of a labeling the narrative of a literary type as not “conjured up by any man’s imagination,” or as “autobiography”—the presumption being that the true story writes itself. This girl, or, at least her face, can present the story herself. Unlike David’s autobiography, which must be delineated in narrative, this girl’s life can be condensed, and viewed in this one photographic image. The caption teaches viewers to appreciate the photographic type for in its ability to compress or dilate time and to serve as a stand-in for narrative.



A HUNGARIAN JEWESS, ELEVEN YEARS OLD, JUST ARRIVED IN THIS COUNTRY.
A TYPE THAT PRODUCES MANY NEW YORK
SCHOOL-MISTRESSES

Figure 4 Image of Hungarian Jewish Girl From McClure's, April 1913

At the conclusion of his article, Hendrick tells readers, “The writer has contented himself chiefly with recording facts, and has only incidentally touched upon the racial traits and training that have made possible this success” of Jews in America; for a closer look at the racial traits, he invites us to read Cahan’s story.²⁰³ Yet these photographic types, I contend, also fill in this supposed gap about Jewish racial traits, by activating the visual language of racial typology. The photographs and their discursive framing invite readers to perform the typological process of discerning whether an image replicates, or deviates from, the Jewish racial ideal. Their framing also promises viewers the ability to see through time when they look at a photographic type. This particular collection of Jewish photographic types in *McClure’s* points to the role of popular media in circulating this form of biological imagination. Moreover, these photographic types and their relation to those created by nineteenth-century scientists invite us to reconsider how we read Cahan’s novel and its connections to popular science.

Typology Against Urban Chaos

I have thus far framed the Galton and *McClure’s* images as photographic types, within a natural scientific tradition of image making. Yet there is another tradition that these projects can fit into: urban photography. Nearly all of the *McClure’s* photographs illustrate Jews in New York and Galton took his photographs in a London boys’ school; my analysis of both sets of images has suggested that the typological mode of seeing can extend from the photographic type to photographer’s and viewer’s sightlines on city streets. So too, Blair’s concept of “arrest” and the photographic mode of seeing racialized others typologically is developed specifically to theorize photography and visibility in Manhattan’s Lower East Side. Even if these typological images of

²⁰³ Hendrick, 165.

faces do not seem to represent the chaos of urban experience—although little imagination is required to see how similar these photographs are to the criminal mugshot²⁰⁴—it is productive to reflect on the ways that these images are a part of turn-of-the-century urban photography. In particular, photographic types bring in an explicitly biological scientific perspective to this field.

American photography focusing on the urban poor most notably gained traction through the book, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (1890) by Jacob Riis.²⁰⁵ The book contains photographs (and drawn reproductions of photographs), mainly taken by the author himself, which accompany his detailed descriptions of life in Manhattan's poor, immigrant-filled neighborhoods. The images portray the city streets and dark, cramped tenements (a feat made possible by new flash technology). The book's investment in representing urban space is also manifested in the many drawings and maps of tenement layouts. Photographs document tenement-dwellers in squalid conditions, taking part in domestic scenes of daily life. Within *How the Other Half Lives* two images stand out, appearing roughly two-thirds of the way through the book, in a chapter on crime, with the caption "Typical Toughs (From the Rough's Alley)."²⁰⁶ The subjects both appear to be organized askew within their frames; both wear jackets and cravats; one wears a hat. Most distinctively, while both men face the camera in the manner of a criminal mug shot, the eyes of neither man open fully enough to see the whites of their eyes, or to have a focused gaze. Instead, we see slivers of black. One mouth hangs open and the other smirks subtly. They do not look altogether *tough*, but nor do

²⁰⁴ For an entree into mug shots within criminal visibility, see John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation : Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

²⁰⁵ Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1895).

²⁰⁶ Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives Studies among the Tenements of New York* / (New York :, 1895), 228, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/yul.12689508_000_00.

they appear altogether sound. These two images stand out among the other illustrations in the book for being portraits, or more specifically, photographic types. Unlike other photographs of people placed within the city's public or domestic settings, which are the book's main focus, these faces are themselves illustrations of the book's story of urban poverty and its ills. While they are not characteristic of Riis's photographs, images of "types" are thus incorporated into the prominent work and are included in the repertoire of what urban photography can be.

Scholars have linked the rise of racial typology and physiognomy to geographic and historical shifts including the rise of empire, and urbanization. In particular, photography has held a distinct role in theorizing and capturing interactions in urban environments. As historian Deborah Dash Moore describes, modern New York School photographs (from the 1930s-40s) of strangers in urban spaces are characteristically images of "looks and looking, being looked at, of being looked down upon."²⁰⁷ Some "manifest the evanescent, dancing matrix of sightlines and body language that organize social awareness of city streets."²⁰⁸ The photographs at the center of this chapter do not share the same methods or agenda, and in fact can be put into productive contrast with the later, modern documentary photography of the 1930s. Photographic types can similarly be understood as a response to the "evanescent, dancing matrix of sightlines" in urban contexts. However, rather than documenting these complex and shifting dynamics, typological photography attempts to order the disorderly dance of sightlines (it is no coincidence, as Pearl

²⁰⁷ The rise in the 1930s of documentary photography in the New York School of Photography, as Moore shows, shared an agenda with the Chicago School of Sociology's attempt to understand the social interactions of strangers within urban contexts. Deborah Dash Moore, "On City Streets," *Contemporary Jewry* 28, no. 1 (December 1, 2008): 94, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03020933>.

²⁰⁸ Moore, 102.

argues, that the rise of physiognomy in Victorian culture coincides with urbanization).²⁰⁹ Jewish photographic types and the dynamic process of typological looking can be understood as a scientifically sanctioned, systematized form of visuality that contains and reforms chaotic urban sightlines.

The type as a bulwark against modern experience of urbanization and disorder comes into play in the literary imagination as well. The impulse to organize faces typologically counters the overwhelming experience of encountering the faces and bodies of strangers in an urban landscape, and the need to read them. Typology served as a scientized, biological solution to a key experience of urban modernity. For instance, in Fishberg's study, *The Jews*, he takes pains to delve into the "novelists' conception of the Jewish type," and criticizes the practice of portraying a single, indelible Jewish type.²¹⁰ But he approvingly highlights the British Jewish author Israel Zangwill. In the American context, Zangwill is perhaps best known for his pro-assimilation play *The Melting Pot* (1908), often credited with popularizing the very term. In one novel, Zangwill describes the physical variety of the Jewish leaders on display at an International Zionist Conference. Zangwill writes of "a strange phantasmagoria of faces" which ultimately leads him to ask rhetorically, "Who speaks of the Jewish type?"²¹¹

Zangwill characterizes the stream of Jewish bodies as a "a strange phantasmagoria of faces," which he places in opposition to a "Jewish type." This imagery is striking for its dual resonance as both a dream and a visual technology: the fantasmagoria was the name of the

²⁰⁹ Pearl argues that urbanization and the mixing of individuals of different class, national, or racial origins is tightly correlated to the popularity of physiognomic classification in nineteenth-century urban center of London. Pearl, *About Faces*, 108.

²¹⁰ Fishberg, *The Jews*, 90.

²¹¹ Zangwill, qtd. Fishberg, 99. For Fishberg whatever Jewish type may exist would be the culmination of a long history of suffering and persecution.

nineteenth-century magic lantern, distinctive for creating the illusion of moving images—a precursor to what we’d now call moving pictures, or film. Just as Robert Alter theorizes the emergent fictional “vision of the city as phantasmagoria” to mean, “a limited perception of transitory images, which are no more than shards of an ungraspable whole,”²¹² Zangwill here represents the blurring multitude of individuals without any discernable connection. For him, the Jewish phantasmagoria resists typological apprehension. Zangwill thus describes the imagined Jewish type an impossibility; all that is possible is limited perception of an ungraspable whole. And yet, of course, the experience of seeing others as phantasmagoria is the very thing that inspires the process of typological creation—with the final product being a photographic type that contains the layered, contracted and protracted temporality.

Therefore, it serves us to not only see the practice of Jewish photographic types as a response to trends in scientific image making and biology; we can also see it responding to modern urban culture, imagined through biology, and enacted through photography. This claim puts into relief the aesthetic and rhetorical moves of the photographic projects discussed in the following section. Also working in the photographic medium, they maintain the language of “type,” yet imbue a sense of disorder, proliferation, and mutability.

Photographic Counter-Discourses to Typology

If visual technologies and visual culture were important grounds for establishing race science at the turn of the twentieth century, then they would also become the means for producing its counter-discourses and counter-archives. Perhaps the most famous of American photographic projects in the early twentieth century in conversation with, yet subverting,

²¹² Robert Alter, *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* (Yale University Press, 2008), 30.

common tropes of racial photographic types, was Du Bois's collection, "Types of the American Negro" for the 1900 Paris exhibition.²¹³ In his work, Du Bois collected hundreds of photographs of African Americans into three albums, including many portraits, which emphasized variation in hair, skin tone, and facial features, as well as photographs from various universities and schools, which displayed middle class respectability and affluence.²¹⁴ As Shawn Michelle Smith has elaborated, Du Bois crucially used race science's technology (the photograph) and vocabulary (the "type") to challenge this essentializing science, and notes that "Galton's fantasy of pure racial types must falter under the weight of Du Bois's 'white types with Negro blood.'"²¹⁵ Du Bois's project for the Paris Exhibition also highlights that photographic racial typology was a shared scientific practice between Europe and the United States, and that its attendant popular discourse circulated transnationally.

His photographic project came in response to a longstanding history of anthropologists and biologists using photography as proof of historically constant, racial essence of African Americans. For instance, the now infamous collection of photographic "types" of enslaved African Americans, taken by Joseph T. Zealy, served Harvard scientist Louis Agassiz's project of proving that humans of European and African descent were created separately and constituted two separate species, thus shoring up the idea that racial distinctions were necessarily static—ultimately, in defense of slavery.²¹⁶ Du Bois then harnessed the form of the photographic type

²¹³ Anne Maxwell, *Picture Imperfect: Photography and Eugenics 1870-1940* (Brighton [England]; Portland, Or.: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 218.

²¹⁴ Smith, "Looking at One's Self through the Eyes of Others."

²¹⁵ Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 63. In Smith's study of Du Bois's photographic project and presentation at the World's Fair, Galton serves a key eugenicist whose photographic types provide a paradigm for the formal photographic vocabulary of photographic racial types. .

²¹⁶ Brian Wallis, "Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz's Slave Daguerreotypes," *American Art* 9, no. 2 (1995): 40. These images hold an ambivalent place in histories of visual culture. On the one hand, because they were created as rare silver daguerreotypes, they are viewed to this day as artistically and technologically significant and

and practices of typological looking, in order to challenge many of these assumptions of uniformity and stasis. As Shawn Michelle Smith argues,

“...while the first images in Du Bois’s 1900 Paris Exposition albums formally recall the photographs that eugenicists and biological racialists used to codify bodies in racial terms, Du Bois’s albums as a whole dismantle the physical coherence of the imagined racial type, disengaging the images of African American men and women from the circumspection of a sliding evolutionary scale. For what is the ‘Negro type’ as represented in Du Bois’s photograph albums? First, it is plural—“types”—a diverse array of individuals not bound by physical appearance...”²¹⁷

Thus, in labeling these images, “types” (plural), DuBois utilizes the visual technology of photography and undermines the racial-biological category of the “type.” The synchronous plurality of these types particularly helps to contradict a “sliding evolutionary scale”—the presumed historical permanence made known in racial types. DuBois’s work thus contributes to what Britt Rusert has called a counter-archive to the long nineteenth century’s racial science.²¹⁸

DuBois subverts these associations in his Paris Exhibition project, using the conventions of photographic types, as well as other photographic modes to demonstrate the dignity and diversity of African American life. Smith has suggested that by activating both the photographic forms of the criminal mugshot and the sentimental, middle-class family album, DuBois directly challenges the racist association of African American criminality.²¹⁹ Imbedded in this collection of images is not only a nod to these aesthetic forms, but also an acknowledgement of particular social formations (such as the family) and biological categories (such as evolution and typology). And as such, the features of these photo albums, including sentimentality, style, and self-

are housed in the collections of prestigious art museums. On the other hand, the contemporary viewer can identify the coercive relationship between the photographer and the undressed, enslaved women and men that are the subjects.

²¹⁷ Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 61.

²¹⁸ Rusert, *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture*, 112.

²¹⁹ Smith, “Looking at One’s Self through the Eyes of Others,” 583.

fashioning—which we might usually think of as aesthetic or artistic—can be understood as powerful tools of biological imagination, because of their displayed ability to either facilitate or frustrate the scientific, racializing gaze.

Du Bois uses the tools of photography and typological discourse to obscure race's legibility—to manipulate the known system of looking at African Americans. Later in his life, Du Bois recalled the significance of his time in Europe for understanding the cultural specificity of these discourses and practices that make race visible. He wrote in his autobiography that while studying in Germany from 1892-4, he was mistaken for a Jew in Europe on more than one occasion.²²⁰ Reflecting in 1952 on his time spent in Germany, he recalls not merely a visual conflation of his blackness with Jewishness, but also people's disinterest in his racial identity and relatively greater dislike for Jews, which "astonished" him, because, "It had never occurred to me until then that any exhibition of race prejudice could be anything but color prejudice."²²¹ Here too, Du Bois reminds us that not only "race prejudice," but the ability to *see race* is itself a malleable and learned process: the ability to see Jews (or understand how he could himself be seen as a Jew) in Europe was not entirely legible to him. Likewise, in the collection, he tried to obscure the legibility of these photographs, these "Types of the American Negro" as biological, racial types.

²²⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. DuBois a Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century*, [1st ed.], Black Thought and Culture (New York]: International Publishers, 1968), 175; W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto," *Jewish Life*, May 1952, vol. 6 no.7 edition, 14 In one particular story, which he reproduced in multiple writings, a cab driver taking him from Budapest to a small town in Galicia, looked at him and asked if he'd like to stay "unter die Juden [with the Jews]."; See also Harold Brackman, "'A Calamity Almost Beyond Comprehension': Nazi Antisemitism and the Holocaust in the Thought of W.E.B. DuBois," *American Jewish History*; *Waltham, Mass.* 88, no. 1 (March 1, 2000): 53–93.

²²¹ Du Bois, "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto," 14.

DuBois serves as a fascinating and rather explicit example of manipulating the established formal and discursive features of racial photography in order to challenge the essentialist claims of racial typology. I argue that we can identify a similar endeavor (even if not the same theoretical underpinnings) in a recurrent feature in the *Forverts* (*Jewish Daily Forward*), the socialist paper founded by Cahan, and New York's most significant Yiddish daily newspaper. Throughout the mid-1920s and 1930s, the *Forverts* ran a feature in the Sunday Arts section that published portraits of Jewish women. The Sunday Arts section—rather unique for its moment—was published bilingually, with headlines in both English and Yiddish. The headlines in each language were not quite “literal” translations of each other. The feature's title in English was consistently “Portrait Studies of Jewish Women,” yet in Yiddish, it varied between “*Tipn fun yidishe froyen*,” (“Types of Jewish Women”) and “*Tipn fun yiddishe sheynhaytn*,” (“Types of Jewish Beauties”).²²² In one spread from July 1926, you can find one woman who sports a sleek bob and wears a cap and gown.²²³ Another peers out through her short finger waves; the portrait captures her formal sleeveless dress ornamented with a large flower pinned to the shoulder. Yet another woman stands in front of a photographer's backdrop, wearing a small turban, a vest, a blouse, and a long skirt, and carries a pitcher as a prop. The women in the photographs are self-styled, and express some combination of pride, modernity, glamour, and respectability. Rather than the *Forverts* creating these images, readers sent them into the paper for publication, from around the United States and from as far away as Warsaw and Berlin. The very fact that the

²²² The feature ran intermittently, interspersed with other photography spreads week to week. For example: “Tipn Fun Yidishe Froyen/Portrait Studies of Jewish Women,” *Der Forverts/The Jewish Daily Forward*, October 11, 1925, sec. Arts Section; “Tipn Fun Yidishe Sheynhaytn/Portrait Studies of Jewish Women,” *Der Forverts/The Jewish Daily Forward*, March 21, 1926, sec. Arts Section.

²²³ “Tipn Fun Yidishe Froyen/Portrait Studies of Jewish Women,” *Der Forverts/The Jewish Daily Forward*, July 4, 1926, sec. Arts Section.

Forverts called them *tipn*, places the photographs into a typological discourse and initiates the typological process of looking.



Figure 5 "Portrait Studies of Jewish Women," New York City, July 4, 1926 (Center for Jewish History Archive)

Riv-Ellen Prell has suggested that this weekly feature stood as an attempt to frame communal attitudes regarding young Jewish women in the period. "With these photographs," she writes, "The *Forward* [*Forverts*] proclaimed that young Jewish womanhood—modern, American, and desirable—was worthy of display for others to see."²²⁴ The portraits featured in the *Forverts*, Prell argues, counteract the stereotype, which prevailed in New York City at the time, of young working Jewish women as vulgar, overly desirous "ghetto girls."²²⁵ Therefore, for

²²⁴ Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Assimilation and the Trouble Between Jewish Women and Jewish Men* (Beacon Press, 1999), 22.

²²⁵ Prell, 25.

Prell, these photographs are an outward-facing statement of communal pride, or, are at least meant to instruct readers in the value of outward-facing pride. Yet we might attempt to further account for the complexity of the series' Yiddish and English titles. Even if the newspaper published bilingually (giving us both “portraits” and “*tipn*”) we can safely presume that only Jews read the *Forverts*. It is possible that calling the images “types” in English would have seemed like a dangerous invitation of racialization, in case any non-Jew caught a glimpse of the paper, say across the aisle of a subway car. Regardless, calling these images *tipn*, only in Yiddish emphasizes the Jewish creation and audience of the photographs' status as types. It seems to make a joke of biological, racial typology.²²⁶

Much like DuBois's images, the *Forverts*'s “types of Jewish women” represent variation, proliferation, and adaptation to modernity. The series itself even enacted a temporal unfolding as each new collection of photographs came to print. So too, even though these photographic “types” are dubiously scientific or biological, they rely on the visual codes and photographic vocabulary that served racial typology. If, as I have argued thus far in the chapter, labelling a photograph as a “Jewish type” performs significant work in framing how that image ought to be read, then these photographs, too, invoke and initiate that process of typological sight—even if the photographs themselves seem to resist such reading.

Indeed, these images stand in juxtaposition to other photography series concurrently published in the Sunday Arts section. These included a collection called “Types of Jewish Life,” with ethnographic images of Jews on the Lower East Side, Jews in Palestine, and Jews in European *shtetlakh* (the section also published ethnographic images of non-Jews in far-flung places like Scandinavia). In the Jewish ethnographic series, images of “old time Jews” also

²²⁶ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*.

participate in the photographic typological discourse, and emphasize the relative modernity of the women in the Jewish women feature. The juxtaposition between these sets of images echoes the dichotomy of the “Modern Jew” versus “Ancient Jew,” which so fascinated Galton, Jacobs, and many other racial thinkers. As such, the “*Tipn fun yidishe froyen*” series asserts the women’s modernity, their individuality, and their variability, not only through irony—they also assert these things through a contrast to other Jewish typological images. The “types of Jewish women” spoof typological vocabulary and processes, yet do not seek to undermine them. The photo series exemplifies the paradoxes and challenges of attempting to bend racial typology through adopting typology’s own operations.

Similar attempts extended beyond the photographic medium. Works across many forms can activate typological framing or visual operations, even in spite of stated intentions to dispense of types. Take for instance the book of drawings, etchings, and paintings by the artist Lionel Reiss, titled, *My Models Were Jews* (1938).²²⁷ So persistent was the question of a Jewish visual type, that the first section, which includes pictorial depictions of Jewish faces, is titled, “Is There a Jewish Type?” And, so closely was this question of Jewish visual distinctiveness associated with the science of race, that the section’s introduction is written by none other than Franz Boas (whose answer to the question of a Jewish type, is, in a word: *no*). Boas explains that “The term Jewish race is a misnomer,” and the brief introduction invites readers to compare the differences between the drawings that follow—the assimilated American Jew to the Bokharan Jewish workman, for instance—to see that there is no common Jewish type.²²⁸ Oddly enough, Boas’s invitation to assess and compare the different images of faces echoes the sort of

²²⁷ Lionel S. Reiss, *My Models Were Jews* (The Gordon Press, 1938).

²²⁸ Franz Boas, “Introduction,” in *My Models Were Jews*, by Lionel Reiss (The Gordon Press, 1938), 17.

instructions that Jacobs provides for viewers to see the essential Jewish gaze in Jewish photographic types, and in fact facilitates a typological process of looking for replication or deviation of an ideal. Reiss's medium was not photographic, but his project of traveling and recording Jewish subjects was evidently ethnographic. He set out in 1921 to make "a graphic history of the Jew, first in a series of portrait studies and second, in the recording of memorable landmarks both old and new."²²⁹ These portraits were meant to show individuality and variety among Jews rather than a single type. For Reiss, these drawn images are also intended to serve as a "graphic history," and he suggests that the collection of portraits drawn over roughly a decade could record "forty centuries of the Diaspora."²³⁰ Even if these images are framed as a counterpoint to Jewish typicality, Reiss's confidence that he could represent a vast historical scope in the drawings of several dozen Jewish faces suggests, albeit ironically, the influence of typology and the biological imagination.

Such an irony is also shot through Fishberg's 1911 scientific argument against "the Jewish type" with which I opened this chapter. Fishberg may deny a single, indelible Jewish type, yet he illustrates his argument using photographs of Jews labelled as "types." In fact, Fishberg's preliminary digest of sub-topics for his "Jewish Types" chapter reveals the particular manner in which he argues for the plurality of Jewish types, including, "The Sephardi type of Jews—The Ashkenazi type of Jews—The Slavonic type—The Turanian type—The Teutonic type—The Mongoloid type—The Negroid type—Other types of Jews."²³¹ Fishberg's list of key terms presents the author's concern over the multiplicity or uniformity of the Jewish type(s). He

²²⁹ Reiss, *My Models Were Jews*, 13.

²³⁰ Reiss, 13.

²³¹ Fishberg, *The Jews*, 90.

casts his theory of acquired, and therefore inconstant, Jewish physical types through what he sees as stable types (for instance, he sometimes describes representations of Jewish lips as “negroid”). He does not make his argument over and against typological knowledge; he instead carries out his argument against the Jewish type *through* typological knowledge. Describing the Sephardic type, Ashkenazi type, as well as Mongoloid type, Teutonic type, and Negroid type, Fishberg wishes to disabuse us of the notion that there exists a uniform, static Jewish type, yet not so much to free us of the framework of types or typology.²³²

Looking to Fictional Types, Looking Ahead

In the next chapter, I will examine how the concept of racial type is expressed in Yiddish and Jewish American fiction in the 1940s. The leap in time marks a shift in attitudes about the science of race and the racial aspect of Jewishness in American culture. Between the 1910s when Cahan’s fictional character showed, “by concrete example, the minute workings of that wonderful machine, the Jewish brain,”²³³ and the 1940s when the novels *The Family Carnovsky* (1940-1/1943), *Focus* (1945), and *Gentleman’s Agreement* (1947) dramatized and critiqued the idea of a Jewish type, a counter-discourse spearheaded by Boas attempted to challenge the essentializing race science of the late nineteenth century, and began to label race science more broadly as pseudoscience. Nonetheless, the scientifically invested novels of the 1940s that I explore in the following chapter attest to the looming remains of race science within these authors’ biological imaginations. That these authors all address American antisemitism through

²³² This serves his larger thesis of the book: such a diversity of Jewish types would prove, then, that Jews can be viewed like the rest of “civilized” humanity.

²³³ Hendrick, “The Jewish Invasion of America,” 165.

the concept of racial type—in a manner, I will argue, that is informed by visibility—is a reaction to race science’s deadly implementation under the Nazi regime.

Yet scientific Jewish racialization had material and political stakes in the United States as well. American eugenics’ influence—whether overt or spectral—did not diminish entirely in these intervening decades. In 1918, when Boas was elected president of American Anthropological Association, the eugenicist Madison Grant and other proponents of racial anthropology formed an alternative association, the Galton Society of America, which would be free of what they dubbed “Jewish science.”²³⁴ It is no coincidence that Jewish scientists (like Boas and Fishberg, who were themselves immigrants from Europe) were so tightly associated with the challenge to American race science. After all, eugenicists often took Jewish immigrants as their target.²³⁵ The United States’ Immigration Act of 1924, which restricted immigration from all Asian countries entirely, and limited immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe (effectively ending the era of mass Jewish immigration to the United States) is one monumental testament to the place of eugenics in American society. And, it should be noted, Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), which synthesized and promoted American race science, was

²³⁴ Each labeled the other camp “Jewish science” and “pseudoscience,” respectively, as de-legitimization. As noted elsewhere in this dissertation, the determination of something as “pseudoscience” is often laden with historical, political, ethical significance, beyond designating it as false or a false way of knowing. Morris-Reich, *Race and Photography*, 18 In other words, this term comes from a historically specific, polemical context, not to be taken for granted. See also ; J.P. Spiro, “Nordic vs. Anti-Nordic: The Galton Society and the American Anthropological Association,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 36, no. 1 (2002): 35–48.

²³⁵ For example, the first issue of the *Annals of Eugenics* in 1925 featured one article on “The Problem of Alien Immigration Into Great Britain, Illustrated by an Examination of Russian and Polish Jewish Children.” This study was so extensive that it continued in the journal’s second issue. N.b., In Volume 19, Part I, published in September 1954, the journal began publishing under the *Annals of Human Genetics*, citing the original forward of the founding editor, without disavowing Eugenics. Karl Pearson and Margaret Moul, “The Problem of Alien Immigration into Great Britain, Illustrated by an Examination of Russian and Polish Jewish Children,” *Annals of Eugenics* 1, no. 1 (1925): 5–54, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-1809.1925.tb02037.x>; “Editorial Note,” *Annals of Human Genetics* 19, no. 1 (1954): 79–80, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-1809.1954.tb01265.x>.

the intellectual backbone of that legislation, and was invoked often in the drafting and debating of the 1924 law.²³⁶

Jewish American literary production in that same decade—and around the same time that the *Forverts* photo series was published—re-worked the concept of the “type” in fiction as well. Perhaps most notably, in the 1920s, Anzia Yezierska challenged the essentializing, social scientific gaze in her melodramatic, often ironic, works about the lives of Russian Jewish immigrants in New York City.²³⁷ Many of her short stories represent the demeaning and demoralizing interactions between Jewish immigrants and the aid workers at various charitable institutions that functioned in their neighborhoods. Often in her fiction, romances between uptown patrician men and the poor Jewish women of the Lower East Side are complicated by the men merely seeing the women as racial or scientific “types.”²³⁸

As we saw previously in Fishberg’s citation and discussion of Zangwill, the concept of the Jewish type in both scientific and literary discourse is mutually constitutive and mutually significant. In other words, we can understand the “Jewish type” as a site of exchange (rather than one-way influence) between scientific and literary discourses. Perhaps most significantly,

²³⁶ Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1916), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001275113>.

²³⁷ Up until feminist recuperative projects of the 1970s and 80s, Yezierska’s writing (melodramatic and effusive rather than spare and genteel) had long been associated with the same sort of ghetto vulgarity that could categorize her characters, or the “ghetto girls” described by Prell in the *Forverts* photos. See, for instance: Vivian Gornick, “Introduction,” in *How I Found America : Collected Stories of Anzia Yezierska*, by Anzia Yezierska (New York: Persea Books, 1991), vii–xii.

²³⁸ This is an often-rehearsed trope in her stories, and scholars often associate it with Yezierska’s well-known love affair with John Dewey. For instance in, *Salome of the Tenements* (1923), a novel inspired by the life of Rose Pastor Stokes, the patrician John Manning is first intrigued by the Russian Jewish Sonya, because “in a theoretical way he had accepted her as a type of the people that drew him.” Anzia Yezierska, *Salome of the Tenements*, ed. Harold Denison (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1923), 106; A similar narrative arc plays out in the story, “Wings,” when a young woman named Shennah Pessah falls briefly in love with a sociologist, John Barnes, who views her as “such a splendid type for his research.” Anzia Yezierska, “Wings,” in *How I Found America : Collected Stories of Anzia Yezierska* (New York: Persea Books, 1991), 5.

because the typological discourse outlined in this chapter is invested in temporality—a process of seeing *through* time, which takes place *in* time—it is well suited to narrative treatment. The focus on temporality and historical representation appears in the Zangwill passage as well, as he writes of the Jewish faces, “One can only say negatively that these faces are not Christian. Is it the stamp of a longer, more complex heredity? Is it the brand of suffering?”²³⁹ This question about the relationship between a non-Christian (i.e. Jewish) history stamped on individuals’ faces is, according to Fishberg, “asked justly.” When they suggest that the toll of Jewish history can be read on the faces of Jewish people, they—again, however ironically—produce a rather paradigmatic example of Jewish typological discourse. As the next chapter illustrates, many fictional portrayals of Jewish typology render similarly vexed critiques of typology, which stand as especially ambivalent expressions of biological imagination within postwar American culture.

²³⁹ Israel Zangwill, qtd. Fishberg, *The Jews*, 99.

Chapter 4 “Mestn mit durkhdringlekhe oygn”/Measuring with Penetrating Eyes: Contesting Typological Sight in 1940s Jewish American Fiction

In July 1945, the *Baltimore Sun* reported a story called, “Nuremberg Code Unearthed: Jewish Yank Discovers Law Aimed at His Race.”²⁴⁰ The article tells of a Jewish G.I. from Baltimore named Martin E. Dannenberg, Jr., who along with another American soldier discovered the signed document of the Nuremberg Laws, hidden in a bank vault in the German town of Eichstatt. This other G.I., Fritz (Frank) L. Perls was German-born, from a family of prominent art dealers, and served as an interpreter for the U.S. army. Perls is, according to most accounts, a German Jew, but he was also baptized as a Protestant; nonetheless, under the Nuremberg Laws, he and his family were classified as Jews by blood, and he eventually fled to the United States.²⁴¹ The infamous 1935 laws, also known as “The Law for the Safeguarding of German Blood and Honor,” stripped German Jews of civic rights and established legal definitions of Jewish and German blood. The law accordingly prevented Jewish households from hiring German domestic workers, and restricted marriage between individuals based on their

²⁴⁰ “Nuremberg Code Unearthed: Jewish Yank From Baltimore Finds Law Aimed At His Race Jewish GI Finds Nazi Race Law,” *The Sun* (1837-1993); *Baltimore, Md.*, July 5, 1945.

²⁴¹ Anthony M. Platt and Cecilia Elizabeth O’Leary, *Bloodlines: Recovering Hitler’s Nuremberg Laws from Patton’s Trophy to Public Memorial* (Routledge, 2015), 44 Fritz (Frank) Perls had opened a gallery in Los Angeles by the time he was enlisted. Over the course of his lifetime, his family members had galleries in Berlin, Paris, and New York as well. They were some of the most significant dealers in promoting modern art. Frank Perls was also a prolific writer and wrote essays and stories about the art world. Significantly, many accounts of Perls do not mention that his family had converted to Christianity, and merely describe them as German Jews, or German Jewish refugees.

degree of Jewish descent (meaning, number of Jewish grandparents), effectively codifying into law Jews' racial status.

What was novel about this news story was not so much the American discovery of the law's contents—that was already well known and reported on in the American press. Rather, there is a great deal of symbolic weight placed on the individuals who recovered the physical document, because it contained “a Nazi race law responsible for the death or exile of hundreds of thousands of German Jews.”²⁴² Dannenberg, the Baltimorean Jewish G.I. is reported saying, “Ironical that I and a guy named Perls should be the ones to discover it.” Dannenberg assigns meaning to his fellow G.I.'s name as a sign that readers of the *Sun* are assumed to understand: “a guy named Perls” meant *a Jew*, someone who also would be—and in fact was—impacted by this “Law Aimed at His Race.” The article reminds readers that in Germany, this code would render them both second-class citizens, or worse, but in America, they are lauded as army heroes.

This is a story whose own telling brandishes not only historical irony, but also American moral triumph in the act of excavation.²⁴³ The American victors' seeking out and unearthing the German race code implicitly underscores the United States' official opposition to Germany's legalistic, scientific racism.²⁴⁴ (At the same time, as historians have suggested, the relation

²⁴² “Nuremberg Code Unearthed,” 22.

²⁴³ The document now resides in the National Archives. However, as Celia Elizabeth O'Leary and Anthony Platt write in *Bloodlines*, it spent nearly half a decade in the Huntington Library in Pasadena, California, not on view. General Patton, once he received the document, gave it to the Huntington Library, near his home in Los Angeles, instead of to the Archives. The historians have linked how the document wound up at the Huntington, in storage rather than on display, to the antisemitic culture of Pasadena, an all-white community with a restriction against Jews. Platt and O'Leary, *Bloodlines*.

²⁴⁴ For many Jews, serving in the American military in World War II transformed and deepened what it meant for them to be both American and Jewish. Many experienced a war in defense of Jews, and against antisemitism. For a greater elaboration of the experience of American Jewish soldiers in World War II and its impact on American Jewry, see Deborah Dash Moore, *GI Jews : How World War II Changed a Generation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2004).

between American and German racial-civic projects were closely intertwined; the Germans learned from, and even saw fit to tamper down, American race policies, especially those aimed at Black Americans, when they crafted the Nuremberg Laws.²⁴⁵)

While this *Baltimore Sun* story sets out to distinguish the United States from Nazi Germany, stories of unearthing and exposing antisemitism within the United States would become a significant narrative model in 1940s American culture. Novels following this mold dared American readers to see the similarities between their own beliefs and those attributed to the Nazis. To do so, American novels suggested that scientific, racial antisemitism in the United States was present yet buried—and therefore must be uncovered. As Laura Z. Hobson writes in *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947), to discuss or deal with American antisemitism was to “get at something arcane and buried.”²⁴⁶ That novel's larger aim of exposure hinged on illuminating the relationship between anti-Semitic prejudice and newly discredited race science. Such a strategy was possible because in the 1940s, “The residual scheme of distinct ‘white races’ still had significant purchase on popular ideology and perception,” as Matthew Frye Jacobson writes.²⁴⁷ Thus, the notion of a Jewish race was treated as something that could be dug up from the

²⁴⁵ Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* As Whitman notes, American policies are referenced regularly, and with admiration, in the transcripts of Nazi policy discussions. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler writes of America's singular distinction as a state that had “made progress toward the creation of a healthy racist order of the kind the Nuremberg Laws were intended to establish,” in particular reference to the 1924 restrictive immigration act (2). And even if it were not the case that the Nazis were influenced by American race laws covering immigration, miscegenation, and “second-class citizenship status,” as Whitman contends that they were, the parallel particulars of the countries' race laws are sufficient to challenge American myths. For more details regarding the exchange and influence of American eugenics in Germany up to the 1930s (including Madison Grant, who, as we saw in the previous chapter, influenced that same 1924 immigration act), see Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism*.

²⁴⁶ Laura Z. (Laura Zametkin) Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947), 67.

²⁴⁷ Jacobson notes further, “phrases like ‘the Jewish race,’ if not totally expunged from our popular political lexicon, are nonetheless likely to strike us, not as naturalized and invisible, but as noticable [sic] and vaguely sinister. But as Hobson was writing in the 1940s, the residual scheme of distinct ‘white races’ still had significant purchase on popular ideology and perception.” Jacobson, “Becoming Caucasian,” 96.

recesses of the reader's mind, pieced back together, and presented in narrative form. For many authors of anti-antisemitism novels, uncovering anti-Jewish prejudice and exposing the folly of race science amounted to one and the same goal.

This chapter analyzes three American-penned novels of the 1940s, which engage with the biologically based antisemitism of the Holocaust in more or less explicit ways. These novels are *Di mispokhe karnovski/The Family Carnovsky* (1940-1) by Israel Joshua Singer, *Focus* (1945) by Arthur Miller, and *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) by Laura Z. Hobson.²⁴⁸ These works do not constitute what might usually be described as "Holocaust literature"—they include no references to concentration camps or the numbers murdered—but they are all reactions to the Holocaust and responses to Nazi racism. Each of these novels employ strikingly different literary techniques, suited to their respective audiences: *Family Carnovsky* is a panoramic family saga, notably in Yiddish; *Focus* is a short, raw, and surreal novel of moral transformation; and *Gentleman's Agreement* is a social realist and sentimental "problem novel." Among these, *Focus* and *Gentleman's Agreement* have sometimes served as seemingly natural counterparts for critics, with Hobson's bestselling, decidedly middlebrow novel often receiving unfavorable readings relative to Miller's more experimental work.²⁴⁹ Despite thematic similarities, analyses of these novels hardly ever reference Singer's Yiddish novel written only several years prior, because it only appeared in English translation in 1969. All of these novels, in one way or another, have

²⁴⁸ There are a number of other literary constellations in which we could place these novels. For instance, a similarly surreal sense of unease courses through Saul Bellow's *The Victim* (1947), which also takes place during the sweltering tension of a New York summer; Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant* (1957), like *Focus*, closes with a conversion of sorts; both of these post-war novels also play with the complex phenomenon of Jewish identification, antisemitism, and suffering. And of course, these authors are perhaps more often seen as Miller's contemporaries and peers.

²⁴⁹ Rachel Gordan, "Laura Z. Hobson and the Making of *Gentleman's Agreement*," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 34, no. 2 (2015): 242 Such unfavorable comparisons in no small part reflect that Hobson's novel does not fit the masculine, highly intellectual image that tends to define midcentury Jewish American fiction.

fallen critically and popularly out of vogue, in accordance with changing cultural expectations of how anti-racist art should conceptualize Jewish or racial difference. However, they provide meaningful insight into the importance of biological inheritance and race science in literary critiques of Jewish racialization crafted in the midst of, or in the direct shadow of, the Holocaust. They all represent the possibility that fiction can portray—or even activate—the reforming of the biological imagination.

Comparing English and Yiddish texts from this period comes with some critical baggage. The conclusion of World War II and the year 1945 is deeply ingrained as a watershed moment in cultural, historical, and literary accounts of the United States and modern Jewry both. However, this chapter does not accept a sharp “before/after” distinction in this year, especially with regards to the Yiddish language. I do not promote the idea that Yiddish “died” in the Holocaust. Nor do I wish to reproduce a mythical trajectory of English-language Jewish literature following, and then replacing, Yiddish literature in the postwar United States—even though the plot of the Yiddish novel I’ll be analyzing mostly unfolds in Europe before and during World War II, and the two English novels narrate stories either at the end of, or after, World War II.²⁵⁰ As scholars have shown, Yiddish authors especially were already reacting to the Holocaust (called *der khurbn* in Yiddish, or “the destruction”) well before the war’s end—even before it became known as “the Holocaust.”²⁵¹ Yet Miller and Hobson, too, began writing their novels during World War II,

²⁵⁰ In fact, that myth would likely posit Yiddish already irrelevant by 1940. For a full study on the overlapping, simultaneous, literary production in Yiddish and English that took place in the United States during the Holocaust, see Anita Norich, *Discovering Exile*. Norich contends that, “Yiddish and Anglo-Jewish culture are, indeed, often remarkably different but...they overlap more frequently and more significantly than is commonly supposed” (4). Anita Norich, *Discovering Exile : Yiddish and Jewish American Culture during the Holocaust*, Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007).

²⁵¹ David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Syracuse University Press, 1999); Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Harvard University Press, 1981); Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Holocaust: An American Understanding* (Rutgers University Press, 2016).

suggesting an overlapping, if not entirely simultaneous response on behalf of the authors. Indeed, the comparison of these three novels can even blur what is sometimes seen as an overly precise shift between pre- and post-war historical moments. While the novels might each respond to similar historical and cultural contexts differently, in no small part reflecting unique audiences and reader cultures, I position these three texts as relative contemporaries.

Significant narrative strategies and critical stances bind the novels together. In order to challenge a scientific basis for antisemitism, each novel contests the authority of racial visibility. This chapter builds upon the previous chapter's analysis of the practices around creating photographic Jewish types. While the scientific study of racial types decreased in prominence by the 1940s, traces of the vocabulary, the assumptions, and the visual processes of looking at people as types remained in use, enough to be dramatized and manipulated in these literary works. In these novels of the 1940s, the ambiguous visible distinctiveness of Jewish bodies was explicitly articulated and imagined through the theories, tropes, and images of biological inheritance. Therefore, this chapter illustrates how—and to what effect—each novel takes up race science, and the idea of a visual “Jewish type” in particular, as central to their critiques of antisemitism on either side of this “1945 divide.” These novels all similarly critique racial typology by dramatizing the visual process that it engenders. To do so, they reproduce many of the central themes introduced in the discourse of Jewish photographic typology, such as the power of the Jewish gaze, the evidence of an inherited Jewish history in the Jewish face, and the visual concealment, obfuscation, or ambiguity of Jewishness. Likewise, because the protagonists in *Focus* and *Gentleman's Agreement* are in fact *not* Jewish, and because the Jewish- and German-descended Jegor in *Family Carnovsky* is of an ambiguous “type,” these novels highlight the ability of typology to *produce* Jewish types, rather than apprehend them.

While all of these novels present Jewish typology and racial antisemitism as ultimately worthy of rebuke, their particular contexts precipitated vastly different approaches to the idea that scientifically based antisemitism might be “buried” and in need of “unearthing.” So too, the fact of whether an author published for an exclusively Jewish, transnational audience in Yiddish as the war unfolded (Singer), or for an American audience in English after the war’s end (Miller and Hobson) can begin to account for each author’s willingness to inhabit a typological mode, or to dramatize typology’s processes. These historical and audience contexts also help to make sense of the specific narrative tenor in which each novel presents its dismantling of race science—whether as tragedy or triumph—and what new form of biological imagination it offers up instead.

The Yiddish-language *Family Carnovsky* (serialized beginning in 1940) is deeply imbued with biological and medical knowledge, and typological description. Its critique of race science coincides with crisis, or at the very least, a sense of loss. The notion of a bodily, inherent, inherited Jewishness might seem appealing or fitting for Singer’s secular Jewish cultural project in Yiddish; yet Singer’s literary and political sensibilities reject any sort of ideological, intellectual, or political salvation. By contrast, no loss is associated with the demise of a biologically heritable Jewishness in the works of assimilated, second-generation Jewish American authors like Miller and Hobson, writing for a broad American audience. And yet, in the English-language *Focus*, Miller, like Singer, ventriloquizes scientifically articulated antisemitism and dramatizes the typological process that “produces” Jews, before the central anti-Semitic character undergoes a transcendent change of heart and rejects all distinctions based on origin or descent. *Gentleman’s Agreement* attempts to display and dismantle antisemitism and explicitly invokes science in order to deny a Jewish racial type. Hobson’s novel, then, is more

invested in dramatizing the process of *un-learning* typology than dramatizing its enactment. Yet Hobson's protagonist, too, like those in *Family Carnovsky*, continues to re-imagine Jewish inheritance or the Jewish body through biology. Each of the three novels narrates the re-disciplining of characters' own biological imagination. Not merely responding to cultural or scientific changes, these works of fiction instead enact a cultural shift in the understanding of Jews' biological racialization.

America's Penetrating Gaze

All three of the novels narrate a well-recorded historical phenomenon, which is not always described as expressly rooted in biology or race science: anti-Jewish hiring discrimination. And more specifically, the practice of facial and name scrutiny within it. The occasion of an interviewer scrutinizing a Jewish job seeker's face and name is a key trope of early twentieth-century American antisemitism—both historically and in the literary imagination—wherein “the nose” and “the name” would be treated as the two main loci of Jewish identification.²⁵² Name changing surfaces in each of the novels discussed in this chapter: in *Family Carnovsky*, Joachim Georg (Jegor) Holbeck Carnovsky eventually abandons the Jewish-sounding, “Carnovsky” and uses only the Germanic “Holbeck;” in *Focus* there is great turmoil caused in the protagonist's office when a woman named Miss Kapp is hired and the boss suspects that she was born with a name like “Kapinsky or something;” and in *Gentleman's Agreement*, the protagonist is shocked to learn that his secretary Elaine Wales was rejected from the post she currently holds when she initially applied to work in the company under her given

²⁵² Unlike passing, where an individual hides their true identity and claims another, the act of covering manages an identity to make it less obtrusive without denying it. For Irving Goffman, both “change in name and change in nose shape” served as the two examples of “covering.” Goffman, qtd. in Kirsten Fermaglich, *A Rosenberg by Any Other Name: A History of Jewish Name Changing in America* (NYU Press, 2018), 86–87.

name, Estelle Walovsky.²⁵³ I am by no means the first to observe this widespread literary representation of name changing, yet I wish to emphasize this phenomenon's relationship to scientized facial scrutiny. Specifically, in all of the aforementioned fictional examples, name- and face-scrutiny is dramatized through a process identifiable with racial typology.

In these stories, the changed Jewish name obfuscates Jewishness through language. It then becomes the onlooker's mandate to enact a process of typological looking. The very notion that the changed name should be able to mask Jewishness clashes with a presumption of immediately visible physical distinctiveness. We find this dynamic most prominently in *Focus*, where the protagonist's vocation is hiring, and his work amounts to discerning Jew from gentile. So too, *Family Carnovsky* presents a brief yet revealing scene in an American employment office once the main cast of German Jewish characters lands in the United States. The character Jegor observes the following:

"He knew from the people in line that they were strict about names and faith in employment offices, even though no one said this. He saw it both in the glances from the blonde women who measured everyone up with penetrating eyes, and from the embarrassed glances of the black-eyed and black-haired job seekers, who uttered their Jewish names reluctantly, knowing ahead of time that nothing would come of this." (amended translation)²⁵⁴

²⁵³ Furthermore, as part of the novel's journalistic investigation, Phil and his secretary, Elaine Wales, send out applications for jobs and inquiries to stay at hotels. They are hardly surprised to find that "Green" is welcomed more kindly than "Greenberg." This has clear biographical resonance for Hobson, who never published under her family name, Zametkin. Even before marrying publisher Francis Thayer Hobson, she published under the last name, "Mount," which belonged to a boyfriend of hers. Gordan, "Laura Z. Hobson and the Making of Gentleman's Agreement," 244.

²⁵⁴ "Er hot shoy'n gevust fun di mentshn in der rey, az men iz shtark medakdek veg'n nemen un gloybn in di arbet-biyuroen, khotsh men zogt es nisht. er hot es gezen say in di blikn fun di blonde meydelekh, velkhe mestn yedn op mit durkhdringlekhe oygn, say fun di farshemte blikn fun di shvartsoygike un shvartzhorike arbets-zukher, vos zogn aroys zeyer yidishe nemen mit halb moyl, visndik foroys, az es vet gornit aroyskumen derfun." Israel Joshua Singer, *Di Mishpohe Karnovski: Roman* (New York: Matones, 1943), 485; The English translation by Joseph Singer reads that Jegor notices, "how important last names and religion were in seeking work. He saw it in the eyes of the girls who closely studied the applicants and from the embarrassed glances of the dark-haired Jews who spoke their names quietly and reluctantly, as if afraid to offend" Israel Joshua Singer, *The Family Carnovsky*, trans. Joseph Singer (New York: Vanguard Press, 1969), 383 For the rest of the chapter, I will reference J. Singer's translation, unless noted as my own, "amended translation."

On the one hand, this scene illustrates the tactics of identifying Jews through typology in the United States, which differs little from what the characters faced in Germany in the late 1930s. On the other hand, it also demonstrates the contrasting mores around articulating such discernments within each national culture. Americans might attest opposition to outright antisemitism, such as when Jegor's school principal tells him that anti-Semitic race theories "have no place in an American school."²⁵⁵ Unlike German antisemitism, which explicitly names the Jewish race as an enemy of the nation, Jegor witnesses in the employment office what historians of the period have described as a "genteel," or "social" (as opposed to legal) antisemitism—a "gentleman's agreement" that excludes those that the law will not. Nonetheless, this scene highlights a visual practice in the penetrating, measuring eyes of the employment officers and in the embarrassed glances of the Jewish job seekers. The very language used to describe the women's eyes, which all at once "glance," "penetrate," and "measure" is reminiscent of Allan Sekula's theorization of Francis Galton's composite photographic types, which he argues combine the "desire to look" with the "desire to measure" Jewish faces.²⁵⁶ The scene highlights not only the physical differences between the employment officers and the job seekers, but also the silent typological process of visual scrutiny enacted between them. Singer's novel portrays American antisemitism as unspoken, yet manifest—and facilitated by the typological process of looking.

I will repeatedly return to this trope throughout the chapter, because in both *Focus* and *Gentleman's Agreement* face- and name-scrutiny come to be of great consequence for the novels' plots. The scenes that engage this trope in each novel also dramatize key elements of

²⁵⁵ Singer, *The Family Carnovsky*, 338.

²⁵⁶ Sekula, "The Body and The Archive," 367.

typology. In my reading, these scenes, which present the United States' mythically benign or buried anti-Semitic practices, are in fact moments of biological imagination as well; they are moments that display the imbrication of the scientific and the social or cultural. These interactions, like the photographic encounters of the previous chapter, constitute the creation of Jewish types, based in visuality, and based in purported scientific knowledge.

The Family Saga, with a Difference

I. J. Singer's novel *Di mishpokhe karnovski/The Family Carnovsky* stands as one of twentieth-century Jewish literature's most scathing critiques of antisemitism in Europe. The multi-generational saga follows the Carnovsky family over the course of three generations, from Poland to Germany and eventually to the United States, as the Nazis rise to power. In the first generation, David Carnovsky is a *maskil* (adherent of the Jewish enlightenment, the *haskalah*) and is devoted to shedding his "Eastern" Jewish, Yiddish background upon moving to Berlin. He is dedicated to a German brand of Judaism and Jewishness that is both decorous and scholarly. The novel is propelled into motion when David flees to Berlin in search of what he imagines to be more enlightened minds and for a chance to fully realize Y.L. Gordon's axiom, to live as a "Jew in the home and a man on the street." Yet the novel continuously complicates this idea. As one character puts it, "The fact is we have been gentiles in the house and Jews in the street."²⁵⁷ The implication here is that they will be "Jews in the street" so long as others in society label them and treat them as "Jews." This line anticipates Sartre's thesis (published in 1946) that the anti-Semite makes the Jew, as well as the novel's scenes of producing Jews through types (these

²⁵⁷ Singer, *The Family Carnovsky*, 160.

scenes are key to the novel's thesis about the ultimate failure of the *haskalah's* promise for Jews in Europe).

In the second generation of the novel, David's son Georg fights in World War I and becomes a well-regarded physician. Yet he cuts ties with his father when he marries a Christian German woman, Teresa Holbeck. The third generation is Georg's son, Joachim Georg (Jegor) Holbeck Carnovsky, who is a grotesque embodiment of Jewish self-hatred: the character becomes obsessed with German racial fantasies espoused by his Christian German uncle and the "New Order." The novel thus presents generation after generation of Carnovsky men turning away from their families and Jewish tradition culminating in a virulent anti-Semite. In the end, the entire Carnovsky family flees Germany for the United States after the rise of the Third Reich. The novel closes with Jegor violently killing a Nazi operative in New York and then shooting himself just outside of his parents' apartment.²⁵⁸ As the novel closes, Georg attends to his son's wounds, unsure if he will survive.

Singer wrote *The Family Carnovsky* in the United States, and began publishing it serially in the *Forverts* from 1940-1, in the midst of the catastrophes enveloping European Jewry.²⁵⁹ The history of the novel's composition and publication is reflected in the three sections, which are altogether uneven in length, tone, and theme. Singer's multigenerational saga can be understood as a composite representation of its own sort (described by Elvira Grözinger as a "triptych").²⁶⁰ In

²⁵⁸ This is possibly a figuration inspired by Otto Weininger, the influential author who pathologized Jewishness and Jewish self-hatred. Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred : Antisemitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 293–94.

²⁵⁹ The novel was published in book form in 1943.

²⁶⁰ Elvira Grözinger, "Between Literature and History : Israel Joshua Singer's Berlin Novel *The Family Carnovsky* as a Cul-de-Sac of the German-Jewish 'Symbiosis,'" in *Yiddish in Weimar Berlin: At the Crossroads of Diaspora Politics and Culture*, ed. Gennady Estraiikh and Mikhail Krutikov (Routledge, 2017), 224, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351193672-13>; See also: Malka Magenta-Shaked, "Singer and the Family Saga Novel

the style and scope of Russian realist novels, *Family Carnovsky* presents a panoramic view of Jews' varying degrees of assimilation and alienation in Berlin in the early twentieth century. It also inhabits and dramatizes the various ideologies that governed their world as the third-person omniscient narration shifts focalization among an assortment of characters.²⁶¹ In a novel noted by many scholars to be highly schematic, many characters take on allegorical or archetypal roles, fully embodying a single ideology. Indeed, in reviews of Singer's work, the extent to which Singer was a realist (he rejected the hegemony of social realism in European Yiddish literature) or a modernist was much contested, and this question circled around his presentation of characters. As Norich has noted, Yiddish critics tended to see Singer as a modernist because of his representation of psychological depth, whereas reviewers of his books in English translation tended to view the characters as shallow, and instead valued the author's fictional representations of a lost world.²⁶² The characters in *Family Carnovsky*, while allowed varied motivations and deep internality, hardly ever *surprise*.²⁶³ Therefore, while Singer uses many of the tools of realism, the allegorical nature of the text seems instead rather opposed to it.

The novel's nearly allegorical construction and its use of "character types" is complicated by the fact that the vocabulary of German race science courses throughout the text as well. The text repeatedly exhibits the German construction of, "the 'Jewish body' as a cultural and

in Jewish Literature," *Prooftexts* 9, no. 1 (1989): 27–42 Magenta-Shaked notes that a spate of Jewish family sagas were published in response to the Holocaust.

²⁶¹ The novel's composition resembles yet does not quite fulfill the ideal of "heteroglossia" as delineated by Mikhail Bakhtin. (Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossia is meant to explain a novel free of ideological pull.) Nevertheless, this terminology remains useful. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (University of Texas Press, 2010), 262–63.

²⁶² Norich, *The Homeless Imagination in the Fiction of Israel Joshua Singer*, 5–6.

²⁶³ E.M. Forster describes the difference between a "round" character and a "flat" character as the ability to surprise. He gives the Russian novel, *War and Peace* as an example of a work inhabited by all round characters. E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Rosetta Books, 2010).

scientific idea,” which as John M. Efron has described it, became a site for the German public to construct an idea of their own—of course healthy—national body by contrast.²⁶⁴ The novel’s anti-Semitic German characters pathologize Jewishness, describing the “*Baccilus Judaeus*,” whose mission is to “ravage the healthy German body.”²⁶⁵ Yet their anti-Semitic scientific language incorporates typology as well, such as the idea of a “Negroid-Semitic type” (*negrish-semetisher tip*), which stands in opposition to the “Nordic type” (*norrdisher tip*).²⁶⁶ Even as the novel critiques the political instrumentalization of race science, its Jewish characters are also deeply invested in race science and the biological study of inheritance. This is especially true of the physician Georg, who often associates gentile paleness with sickliness, even extending this notion to his own son’s “*shtark hele* [very pale]” complexion: “He found people of this type not only sickly and of poor recuperative powers, but oddly prone to fantasy, superstition, and romanticism.”²⁶⁷ Significantly, while I am arguing that this passage (in which Georg considers “people of this [pale] type”) fits within a typological logic, the very word “type” only appears in the English version. In the Yiddish original they are merely referred to repeatedly as “zey,” meaning “they” or “them.” Therefore, “zey,” functions as a subject and as an object, both grammatically and conceptually. This dual subject-object “zey” allows for the othering—literally objectifying—work of designating a type.

²⁶⁴ Efron writes, “One feature of such was the manner by which the construction of the pathological Jewish body became a site of political, national, and cultural contestation. For the Germans used elaborate descriptions of the Jewish body (by definition, it was defective) to describe their own physical state.” John M. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews: A History*, viii, 343 p. (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2001), 4–5, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

²⁶⁵ Singer, *The Family Carnovsky*, 194.

²⁶⁶ Singer, *Di Mishpohe Karnovski: Roman*, 287–88.

²⁶⁷ Singer, *The Family Carnovsky*, 186.

Race science and racial typology structure the novel's characterizations in its third-person narration as well. From the very outset, the novel incorporates the logic and language of typologies. For instance, the novel opens with a description of the typical Carnovsky face: "high scholarly foreheads," "deep-set and restless black eyes," and "powerful, oversized noses that jutted from their lean, bony faces."²⁶⁸ From the outset, we are supposed to see these physical traits as evidence of their character: "Their genius was reflected" in their foreheads, and "stubbornness and contrariness exuded from their noses." Not only is this a text deeply attentive to the bodies of its characters, but it is especially invested in the physiognomic coordination of face and character, or the idea of a visible inheritance.

The novel's (admittedly indelicate) typological descriptions of characters reflect the equivalently indelicate and blunt racialized view that others in the story-world hold of them. Georg is always described as "dark," "black," and "swarthy" by characters and the narrator alike. The narrator calls his young classmates, "*hel-bakike*" (literally, pale cheeked) and Georg, "*broyn-bakike*" (literally, brown cheeked);²⁶⁹ the children note this distinction as well, calling him animal names, shouting "black raven!" and "black ape!"²⁷⁰ However, it is the omniscient narrator who, through access to the internal and external world of the novel's characters, authoritatively verifies that there is indeed a connection between his internal and external type. While the narrator ironizes the children's taunts to emphasize their cruelty, it also often describes him as an animalistic and crude stereotype.²⁷¹ Later, when Georg first meets his mother-in-law,

²⁶⁸ Singer, 3.

²⁶⁹ Singer, *Di Mishpohe Karnovski: Roman*, 26.

²⁷⁰ Singer, 27.

²⁷¹ As the novel describes the physical embodiment of Georg's fierce character, it limns a crude racist stereotype of a harsh, animalistic brute. His face is described as, "With flaming black eyes spitting fire, with blushing brown cheeks and with large teeth—a bit too large and not straight, but very white and strong—which looked out from his quite

she immediately identifies his “sharp darkness [*sharfe tunklekeit*],” and feels shame at his medical gaze upon her; she recalls an optician she once knew in whom, “She had seen his entire race: black, talkative, clever, smart, sly...” (amended translation).²⁷² Her view of the medical gaze is typically Jewish.²⁷³ The novel thus offers no respite from racist determinations or typological sight. Instead, it models typological thinking.

Narrating the Typological Process

The Family Carnovsky presents its most striking critique of German race science when it narrates characters engaging in the typological process of looking. In fact, this process comes to shape the two most significant scenes in the novel (arguably the climaxes of Books 2 and 3). In these scenes, characters perform the visual operations of typology, reminiscent of the strategies employed in the photographic types discussed in the previous chapter: they come to see elements of Jewish history and racial essence, visible in the Jewish face; they also employ typology precisely because of the ambiguity or obfuscation of Jewish physical distinctiveness.

Jegor, the subject of the family saga’s third generation, presents a crisis of typology for its characters. Georg and Teresa’s son Jegor is described as a “mixture of his two strains” (in Yiddish, it is *tszvey tsdodim*, or two sides): physically carrying the dark hair of the Jewish

red and quite full lips...” (amended translation). “*Mit tseflamte shvarts oygn, vos shitm fayer, mit ongeroyltte broyne bakn un mit groyse tseyn, abisl tsu groyse un nisht glaykhe, ober zeyer vayse un shtarke, vos kukn aroys durkh hipsh royte un hipsh fule lipn...*” (Israel Joshua Singer 29). Georg’s large, strong, crooked teeth which gape out of his full lips seem even more sinister in contrast to the blond boys whom he bosses around and the “...girls with stiff braids and freckled, tender necks” (amended translation). “*...meydlekh mit shtayfe tseplekh un bashprekhte veykhe heldzlekh*” (29).

²⁷² Singer, *Di Mishpohe Karnovski: Roman*, 171.

²⁷³ Gilman, *The Jew’s Body*, Gilman points out the complexity of the Jewish medical gaze: “How can the image of the healer be the same as the image of the patient? How can the gaze which is pathological also be the gaze which helps diagnose in order to cure?” The Jewish medical gaze is thus not only paradigmatic, but also paradoxical: an objective scientific gaze that is also pathological.

Carnovskys and the blue eyes of the pale, German Holbecks.²⁷⁴ He presents a typological mystery for his family, challenging their presumptions about the typological relationship between facial phenotype and inherited essence. The repeated attempts to determine Jegor's type come to a head when his biology teacher and headmaster, Dr. Kirchenmeier brings the teenaged Jegor to the front of a school assembly in order to demonstrate Nazi race theories on him as a live subject. (This climactic scene of typological construction becomes a turning point in Jegor's life and causes the Carnovsky family to flee Germany.) Dr. Kirchenmeier has Jegor stand in front of a large audience of students, government officials, and journalists, as an example of a "mongrel," whose physical characteristics exhibit the way that the "Negroid-Semitic type" (*negrish-semetisher tip*) can overpower the "Nordic type" (*norrdisher tip*).²⁷⁵

Kirchenmeier's typological treatment of Jegor suggests that one's first glance is not sufficient: rather than an immediate relationship between seeing and knowing, he instructs the students in an extended process of looking. He begins the lecture by measuring Jegor's skull, the area between his eyes and his ears, and compares his skull type to that of an ape. Kirchenmeier tells the large audience, "It may occur at first glance that the subject resembles the Nordic type, but this impression is strictly illusory."²⁷⁶ Through a series of logical manipulations, Kirchenmeier constructs a specific paradigm for the Jewish type or Jewish strain within the body of an individual with mixed inheritance. His theory of the Jewish strain within Jegor's body mirrors the aforementioned theorization of the harmful role of Jewish subjects within the German body politic: the purported invisibility and "insidiousness" of the Jewish racial type

²⁷⁴ Singer, *Di Mishpohe Karnovski: Roman*, 164, 194.

²⁷⁵ Singer, 287–88.

²⁷⁶ Singer, *The Family Carnovsky*, 238.

reflects the anti-Semitic rhetoric of invisible, insidious, Jewish influence. So too, Jewish insidiousness bears out in the problem of a changed Jewish name, which serves as a linguistic obfuscation, and likewise mandates typology. Kirchenmeier continues to explain,

“From the anthropological viewpoint one soon realizes that the Negroid-Semitic strain, which is always predominant in cases of mongrelization, has very subtly allowed the Nordic strain to dominate the external appearances in order to mask its own insidious influences. But this can be ascertained from the subject’s eyes, which, although they may appear blue, lack the purity and clarity of classic Nordic eyes and are full of the negrification and obfuscation of the African jungle and the Asiatic desert. You will also note that the hair, which may seem straight, contains Negro blackness and a hint of inherent woolliness. The prominence of the ears, nose, and lips clearly demonstrates the inferior racial strain.”²⁷⁷

Using the authority of scientific language and figures and theorems drawn on the board behind him, Kirchenmeier teaches the audience how to look at Jegor and how to see him as a Jewish type. The teacher’s description of racial dominance within “mongrelization” reflects what Joseph Jacobs and Maurice Fishberg called the “prepotency of Jewish blood,” or a hypodescent paradigm.²⁷⁸ Hypodescent is typically understood by scholars as a way to describe social classification when the descendant of a mixed union is assigned the identity of the subordinate, rather than the social dominant, group. While one might associate a “prepotent” racial Jewish type with visible distinctiveness, Kirchenmeier instead claims the opposite: The dominant Jewish type *allows* the Nordic type to prevail visibly, as *a mask*. In other words, it is precisely because of the Jewish type’s power that it is obfuscated, and precisely because of this obfuscation that one must enact the typological process in order to expose it.

²⁷⁷ Singer, 238.

²⁷⁸ This idea was also expressed as a scientific fact by Madison Grant in *The Passing of the Great Race*, “Whether we like to admit it or not, the result of the mixture of two races, in the long run, gives us a race reverting to the more ancient, generalized and lower type. The cross between a white man and an Indian is an Indian; the cross between a white man and a negro is a negro; the cross between a white man and a Hindu is a Hindu; and the cross between any of the three European races and a Jew is a Jew.” Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, 15–16.

Kirchenmeier's lecture makes Jewishness evident through the re-interpretation of visible markers. For instance, one sign of Jegor's "mongrelization" is that the "African jungle" and "Asiatic desert" have darkened the child's blue eyes. The word translated as "obfuscation" in the English version is "*tribkayt*" in the Yiddish version, which can mean gloominess or muddiness, in contrast to the "purity" ("*reynkayt*") of eyes in the Nordic type. Kirchenmeier emphasizes the literal mud of these seemingly wild environments on geographically distant continents, implying Jegor's inherent foreignness due to an inherited history. This history materially manifests in—and in fact mars—the marked Jewish body. Altogether, the Jewish type in Jegor's body has an ambivalent relationship to the category of the visible. By enacting the typological process, the teacher and his audience can identify the "hidden traces" of a distant, non-European history in Jegor's face, which are regarded as more significant than any consistently "typical" physical traits. Indeed, this scene dramatizes not only the manner in which Jewish physical ambiguity (or invisibility or obfuscation) mandates typology, but also the manner in which types are created to render an inherited history visible in a subject's face.

Kirchenmeier's typology scene is mirrored in the novel's final climax, when Jegor exacts his violent revenge on the German racial order that has both influenced and rejected him. Once the Carnovsky family emigrates to the United States, Jegor falls prey to Dr. Zerbe, an agent of the Third Reich who recruits him to spy on Jewish anti-fascists in the United States. The relationship between Dr. Zerbe and Jegor is fraught with sexual and racial objectification and violence. Zerbe forcibly kisses and attempts to kiss Jegor multiple times. In the novel's penultimate scene, this sends the young man into a murderous trance. He grabs a statue of an African goddess and bashes in Zerbe's skull. This act of violence accomplishes evident symbolic work: in the novel's homoerotic and homophobic turn, Zerbe interpellates Jegor as the feminized

Jewish man; as Sander Gilman has argued, in this scene Jegor reclaims his masculinity through a grotesque fetish symbol of Black sexuality.²⁷⁹ This supposed reclamation of masculinity triangulated through Blackness is perhaps the most troubling aspect of the scene and certainly deserving of critique. The thematic similarities between this scene and the Kirchemeier scene emphasize the scenes as foils.

Namely, this closing encounter with Zerbe rehearses and rearranges key aspects of the earlier scene with Kirchenmeier, specifically with regards to typology. In this scene, Jegor turns the typological gaze upon Zerbe. The narrative emphasizes Zerbe's skull—both before and after Jegor strikes it. Jegor, after having his own skull measured and pathologized according to a German racial typology, destroys the German's skull. The narration in the moments preceding the attack are laden with the motifs of visibility and the typological process of seeing—by Jegor. After Zerbe's kiss, "Jegor's eyes opened wider and wider and suddenly saw double—two faces [*geshtaltn*] at once. One moment it was Dr. Zerbe's; the next, Dr. Kirchenmeier's. The wrinkles, the murky eyes and naked skulls, even the rasping voices seemed one and the same."²⁸⁰ It is perhaps no surprise that Zerbe is quite literally cast as Kirchenmeier's double: both men carry the authority of the German state and wield scientific discourse to control and objectify Jegor's body. In this doubled vision, Jegor projects a composite image of the two men's faces—they are

²⁷⁹ Sander L. Gilman, "Madness and Racial Theory in I. J. Singer's 'The Family Carnovsky,'" ed. I. J. Singer, *Modern Judaism* 1, no. 1 (1981): 95.

²⁸⁰ Singer, *The Family Carnovsky*, 401. In Yiddish the passage reads: "yegors farnepelte oygn zaynen gevorn breyter, bloyer un gezen toplt, tsvey geshtaltn, mit amol—a vayl iz es geven dr. tserbe, bald iz es geven dr. kirkhenmayer der direktor fun gete-gimnazium, vos hot im derniderikt, bavayzn im in zayn shand far aleman. Nisht nor iz do altkayt un broyn-un-bloykayt un farlofnkayt fun di oygn un di nakete sharbns geven di eygene, nor oykh dos tribe kol" (Israel Joshua Singer 513). "Jegor's foggy eyes grew wider, bluer, and saw double, two figures (geshtalts) at once—for a moment it was Dr. Zerbe, then immediately it was Dr. Kirchenmeier the principal of the Gete-Gimnazium, who had humiliated him, shown him before everyone in his shame (nakedness). It was not only the agedness and the brown-blue filmy eyes and the bare skulls that were the same, it was also the gloomy (muddy) voice." (amended translation).

both “double” and “one and the same”—much like in Galton’s ghostly composite photographic types. Therefore, Jegor’s moment of reckoning is achieved through the creation of a type—he sees how Zerbe’s head conforms to and deviates from that other.

This scene serves as a foil to the initial scene of Jegor’s typological objectification, in both symbolic imagery and in its processes of sight. This move leaves readers with a question of what is made or unmade in the reprise. While it seems on some level that this scene amounts to a toppling of a symbolic order, it cannot be denied that it is also a perpetuation of some of racial typology’s characteristic associations and processes. Moreover, Jegor’s violence against Zerbe is quickly turned into violence toward himself; Jegor is so deeply invested in race science that he cannot destroy it without destroying himself. This moment is the crux of *Family Carnovsky*’s critique of race science and typology, yet it also highlights why this critique is so challenging for the text to produce coherently. If the novel consistently uses typology to generate meaning, then the climactic moment creates a vacuum of meaning for the novel. *Family Carnovsky* may invest in racial typology so as to eventually dispense of it, but this removal, this dissolution of meaning, is not represented as a moment of triumph. It is instead designed to be a crisis in meaning for the text as a whole, as much as it is experienced as a crisis in meaning for the characters. The fact that this final scene takes place in the American section of the text reminds readers that there is no redemption, no “solace of the chance of a better life in America.”²⁸¹

The Crisis of Typology and Biology

The Family Carnovsky’s ambivalence about smashing the typological order arises from its investment in biological thinking and the idea of a bodily, heritable Jewishness. The novel

²⁸¹ Grözinger, “Between Literature and History : Israel Joshua Singer’s Berlin Novel *The Family Carnovsky* as a Cul-de-Sac of the German-Jewish ‘Symbiosis,’” 226.

comes to challenge biological knowledge more generally through the un-typable visible body.

This crisis is introduced most articulately through Georg, the physician, who puzzles over his un-typable son Jegor, and for whom this challenge is narrated as an emotionally charged loss. In an extended internal monologue, Georg rifles through his medical knowledge in the hopes of understanding his son:

“As a surgeon, Georg knew every tissue and cell of the human brain. But what was it actually, that small pile of matter, blood, and veins? Why did it differ so radically from person to person, encompassing every degree of brilliance and stupidity, coarseness and spirituality? Why did it bring joy and fulfillment to one, fear and torment to another? There lay his son, his own flesh and blood. Although he was a mere baby he was already burdened with dark thoughts and morbid fears. Whose blood called out within him in the night? Whose torment disturbed his sleep? Maybe it was some distant ancestor of the Holbecks...Or perhaps it all came from his side, the Carnovskys?...heredity was a mighty force, Georg knew. Often traits cropped up many generations apart. Sometimes they even stemmed from a distant branch of the family—a brother or sister of a great-great-grandparent. Man’s semen was full of hidden forces—good and evil, wisdom and stupidity, cruelty and mercy, health and sickness, joy and sorrow, genius and insanity, ugliness and beauty—all borne along in a tiny drop of liquid propelled by some mysterious force.”²⁸²

His medical knowledge of inheritance and the material body proves incommensurate with the broad sweep of human experience. He is trapped between competing epistemologies of the body: the biological and material, versus the ethical and the spiritual. Georg moves between the literal and metaphorical body: the brain, made up of “matter, blood, and veins”,²⁸³ and his son as “his own flesh and blood.” Of course, typology—the idea that one can find racial essence materially manifest, or that one could reveal “hidden forces” in physical phenotype—intentionally blend these competing systems of understanding the body. Yet, for Georg, these systems cease to line up.

²⁸² Singer, *The Family Carnovsky*, 186.

²⁸³ An alternate translation would be as “a bit of matter made of blood, veins, and tissue.” Singer, *Di Mishpohe Karnovski: Roman*, 222.

Georg continues to consider “*atavizm, yerushe* [atavism, inheritance],” which proposes an alternative to typology (amended translation).²⁸⁴ Atavism can mean either the return of cultural tendencies that had been suppressed or the appearance of physical traits that had apparently disappeared.²⁸⁵ Yet both cultural and biological meanings indicate a particular model of inheritance that is non-linear, inconsistent, mysterious, and points both backward and forward in time. One might expect that Georg, the German assimilated physician, would use language deriving from German in this internal monologue about the application of scientific theories in his own life. Instead, the Yiddish word for inheritance used here, and elsewhere in the monologue, is “*yerushe*,” which derives from Hebrew (or the *loshn-koydesh* element of Yiddish), intensifying the Jewish aspect of the scene. Georg considers *yerushe* again when he thinks, “The heritage of generations trailed behind one like rags one could not cast off. A father could not be the master of his own child...”²⁸⁶ Figured as such, inheritance is a choiceless burden, fixed behind him, out of sight; it is a force felt yet not visible. Unlike the typological idea of a static

²⁸⁴ The idea of atavism, or of an ancestor “whose blood called out within him in the night,” is, like typology, invested in an inherited history. However, this history is various and non-linear: meaning that it is capable of skipping indirectly over and across generations (what Naomi Seidman has called “diagonal” or “avuncular” kinship). In Seidman’s description of queer forms of Yiddish inheritance, she provides the avuncular as a model. Significantly, for Seidman, the avuncular is specifically non-biological, because it is not passed from parent to biological child or the direct result of sexual reproduction. Yet as this example shows, the biological imagination in Yiddish prose can in fact pave the way for imagining avuncular inheritance. Naomi Seidman, *The Marriage Plot: Or How Jews Fell in Love with Love, and with Literature*, Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture x, 354 pages (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>; Significantly, through Georg’s meditation, the novel introduces a new, biologically informed conception of inheritance that accounts for variation. As such, the novel introduces a challenge to the typological notion of intergenerational consistency. Furthermore, on the level of genre, the non-linear, mysterious, avuncular model of inheritance complicates the intergenerational family saga’s model of generational progress—attempted by both David and Georg, to better the family in each generation—or conversely, of progressive degeneracy, an idea that could describe the generic-generational model in *Family Carnovsky*. Gilman, “Madness and Racial Theory in I. J. Singer’s ‘The Family Carnovsky’”; Singer, *Di Mishpohe Karnovski: Roman*, 222.

²⁸⁵ Freud’s idea of the uncanny (*unheimlich*) relies on the idea of generationally suppressed superstitions in particular. “The uncanny” is a name for our feeling the presence of these supposedly past, supposedly overcome superstitions or irrational beliefs. The uncanny is the emotional manifestation of atavism.

²⁸⁶ Singer, *The Family Carnovsky*, 185.

racial essence, this specifically Jewish inheritance, this trail of rags, is mysterious, temporally complex, and inconsistently visible.

The scene ultimately fractures Georg's faith in biology. He turns to a book by Gregor Mendel, often called the father of genetics; Mendel provides him with impressive figures, yet no answers.²⁸⁷ Earlier in the scene, Georg had recalled the words, "It is nature, blood, inheritance, the eternal law of continuity" offered by colleagues, "with whom he'd once spoken about this. But what is nature and what is blood and what is inheritance?" (amended translation).²⁸⁸ This question evinces Georg's emotional response to scientific knowledge. Yet, again, it suggests biology's insufficiency in answering his questions. After all, what *can* we purport to know of nature, of blood, of inheritance? If this scene ultimately challenges the primacy of biological theories of inheritance, then this is a challenge precipitated by the appearance of a body, seemingly impervious to typology. This loss is, indeed, characteristic of Singer. As Norich has argued, Singer's narratives "reject all the avenues of escape available in his culture," be they social movements, revolution, individualism, or religion; his fiction suggests that belief in such redemption, "arises from the misunderstanding of history and a kind of magical thinking that cannot be sustained."²⁸⁹ In *Family Carnovsky*, the biological imagination amounts to one such

²⁸⁷ "He wondered at the monk who had so precisely classified all of the inherited traits, and had traced out each branch with lines and figures. But nothing became clearer from this" (amended translation). "Er bavundert dem monakh vos hot azoy genoy klasifisirt ot di yerushe-zakhn, ongetseykhnt yeder tsvayg mit linies un tsipern. Ober klorer ver gor nisht fun im." Singer, *Di Mishpohe Karnovski: Roman*, 223; Joseph Singer's translation reads, "The monk's brilliant interpretations, accompanied by accurate proofs, fascinated Georg but did not explain the basic riddle." Singer, *The Family Carnovsky*, 186.

²⁸⁸ "Dos iz natur, blut, yerushe, dos eybike gezets fun der derhaltung, zogn im doktoyrim kolegn, mit velkhe er redt a mol vegn dem. Ober vos iz natur un vos iz blut un vos iz yerushe?" Singer, *Di Mishpohe Karnovski: Roman*, 223; In Joseph Singer's translation, the passage is somewhat shortened as, "This was nature, his colleagues explained, but what did it actually mean, this word?" Singer, *The Family Carnovsky*, 186.

²⁸⁹ Norich, *The Homeless Imagination in the Fiction of Israel Joshua Singer*, 11.

form of magical thinking.²⁹⁰ Georg does not abandon the practice of medicine that night, but re-directs his seeking from the father of genetics, to a philosophical text. In so doing, he attempts to re-discipline himself and his relation to biological knowledge. Biology can provide him with impressive proofs and figures, but not the solace of eternal laws, and certainly not redemption.

***Focus* and America's Jewish Typology**

Arthur Miller's 1945 novel, *Focus*, has been described as the first post-war Jewish American novel and as the first American novel in response to the Holocaust. Despite such distinctions, it is no longer widely read, studied, or taught—likely because the experimental work is focalized through a racist and anti-Semitic man, and propagates a great deal of his hateful thoughts in its prose. The novel's action—all taking place during one sweltering New York City summer—is limited and brief, and the tone is raw, gritty, and surreal. Set during the end of the United States' participation in World War II, the novel, according to Miller, was inspired by antisemitism he witnessed during the war. Decades later he'd write in a foreword to the novel, "As far as I knew at the time, antisemitism in America was a closed if not forbidden topic for fiction—certainly no novel had taken it as a main theme."²⁹¹ For Miller, the writing and publishing of *Focus* constituted breaking an American taboo (although, looking at Yiddish

²⁹⁰ This, of course, is not the novel's end, but a moment of intellectual change for one character. As Norich has found through the correspondence between Singer and Abraham Cahan, the editor of the *Forverts*, Singer struggled to end the novel, to find a fate for these characters amid the history that continued to unfold (when he initially sent the text to be published in the *Forverts*, he had only composed the first two—out of three—books). Norich, 54–55.

²⁹¹ Arthur Miller, "Introduction," in *Focus* (New York: Arbor House, 1984), viii; In a 2001 piece published in the *New York Times*, Miller states that he felt freed to publish *Focus* once *Gentleman's Agreement* came out: "If there was no explosion once it appeared, I thought it was quite possibly because 'Gentleman's Agreement' had beat it out by a month or two and helped break the ice." This is curious, because *Focus* was published first. It is possible that Miller's memory was somewhat blurred, but it is significant that he, himself, links these two novels and their social impact. Miller published this reflection on *Focus* in coordination with the release of the film adaptation of the novel. Arthur Miller, "WRITERS ON WRITING; Shattering The Silence, Illuminating The Hatred," *The New York Times*, October 22, 2001, sec. Arts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/22/arts/writers-on-writing-shattering-the-silence-illuminating-the-hatred.html>.

novels written in the United States might challenge the idea that *Focus* was the “first” to do so). Miller has described this novel as “shattering a silence,” in spite of his and others’ fear that bringing attention to the central themes would lead to “an outbreak of open antisemitism in America.”²⁹² Miller frames *Focus* as a novel of critique through exposure; it articulates a form of antisemitism that is seemingly benign and undergirded by science and visuality.²⁹³ As the title might suggest, *Focus* is concerned with seeing and being seen, the power of sight, and technologies of vision. Moreover, the elaboration in *Focus* of racial typology and the production of “Jewish types” echoes the processes for creating types found in racial photography, and in *Family Carnovsky* as well.

The main character in *Focus* is Lawrence Newman, a deeply racist and anti-Semitic gentile, whose work at a large Manhattan company as a personnel manager mainly entails hiring and overseeing secretaries. At work and on the street, he compulsively identifies Jews by reading faces for “the Hebrew dip to the nose” or “the sad-eyed gloom over the upper face.”²⁹⁴ The previously described practice of face- and name-scrutiny in the job market informs his daily interactions. Newman first finds trouble in the novel when his poor vision causes him to accidentally hire a presumably Jewish woman, Miss Kapp, as a new secretary at his firm. Newman’s boss reprimands him seeing as, “Miss Kapp is obviously not our type of person,” and

²⁹² Specifically in response to the ship, *St. Louis*, which was filled with Jewish refugees and was turned away from the United States and sent back to Nazi Europe, Miller writes, “Along with a lot of others, what I made of the silence was that everybody, not excluding myself, was afraid of an outbreak of open antisemitism in America should that shipload of refugees be allowed to disembark.” Miller, “WRITERS ON WRITING; Shattering The Silence, Illuminating The Hatred.”

²⁹³ Miller also wrote around the release of the film adaptation that with the novel he had, “wanted to expose to the light what [he] intimately knew about a topic that was largely unreported.” Arthur Miller, “His Jewish Question,” *Vanity Fair*, accessed June 18, 2019, <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2001/10/arthur-miller-200110>.

²⁹⁴ Arthur Miller, *Focus*, Arbor House Library of Contemporary Americana. (New York: Arbor House, 1984), 34.

insists that Newman get glasses.²⁹⁵ But when he finally gets glasses, it only makes the matter worse, because he starts to be mistaken for a Jew himself. This development leads to his dismissal from his job, trouble finding new work, and organized violence in his neighborhood from the Christian Front. The novel closes with Newman reformed after he is targeted by an anti-Semitic attack: he longs for “a charge of lightning that would with a fiery stroke break away the categories of people and change them so that it would not be important to them what tribe they sprang from. It must not be important anymore, he swore, even though in his life it had been of the highest importance.”²⁹⁶ Because of this revelation, the erstwhile anti-Semite does not correct the police officers investigating the attack when they presume that he is Jewish. This closing wish and admission to Jewishness seems to support the idea of race, ethnicity, and national origins as surface-level—and therefore trivial—distinctions. While Newman’s transformation in the novel may ultimately have little impact on his surroundings, its ending bears the patent mark of Miller’s universalism as well as his “confidence in human rationality and progress,” as Ladislaub Löb has suggested.²⁹⁷

In *Focus*, the typological process of looking—of not only discerning, but also producing, Jews—is unspoken. The very word “type” gains importance because of the way that it moves between signifying a visual classification of Jews and other racialized individuals, to a euphemistic term that circumvents explicit statements about these classifications. Therefore, the novel’s portrayal of typology is less overtly biological than what is expressed in segments of

²⁹⁵ Miller, 17.

²⁹⁶ Miller, 217.

²⁹⁷ Ladislaus Löb, “‘Insanity in the Darkness’: Anti-Semitic Stereotypes and Jewish Identity in Max Frisch’s ‘Andorra’ and Arthur Miller’s ‘Focus,’” *The Modern Language Review* 92, no. 3 (1997): 558, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3733383>.

Family Carnovsky. Nonetheless, in *Focus*, the ability to quite literally *produce* Jews through looking contributes to what David R. Mesher has called, “Miller’s larger scheme to create allegory from a novel-of-the-absurd.”²⁹⁸ The novel repeatedly dramatizes the typological process in a manner that bears a marked resemblance to the biologically informed, typological mode of looking developed through race science. Indeed, the novel illustrates the practice of typological discernment, learned through the popular dissemination of scientific ideas.

As in *Family Carnovsky*, the narration of *Focus* incorporates typology into the text’s descriptive fabric. The opening scene finds Newman on a train, mentally assigning racial types to his fellow passengers. He refers to one person as the “Hindenburg type of Jew” because of the large bags under the man’s eyes and thinks of him as, “a man whose type to him was like a rare clock to a collector.”²⁹⁹ Newman continues to describe the man through a catalogue of phenotypic evidence and an assumption of expert knowledge,

“The man was staidly reading the *Times*, His skin was fair, the back of his neck flat and straight, his hair was probably blond beneath his new hat, and on squinting, Mr. Newman caught a glimpse of the Hindenburg bags under the subject’s eyes. The mouth he could not see clearly, so he supplied it—broad and full-lipped...probably he alone on this train knew that this gentleman with the square head and the fair skin was neither Swede, nor German, not Norwegian, but a Jew.”³⁰⁰

Newman describes—and prescribes—the man’s features according to physiognomic measurements: from the shape and length of the neck to the pallor of the skin. First squinting and then guessing about the man’s hair color and mouth (both of which are out of view), Newman

²⁹⁸ David R. Mesher, “Arthur Miller’s ‘Focus’: The First American Novel of the Holocaust?,” *Judaism* 29, no. 4 (Fall 1980): 474.

²⁹⁹ Miller, *Focus*, 9; Miller also invokes the German statesman Paul von Hindenburg in an autobiographical reference, “...my grandfather turned to me with his great bald head and the bags under his eyes like von Hindenburg’s...” Arthur Miller, “A Boy Grew In Brooklyn,” *HOLIDAY*, March 1955.

³⁰⁰ Miller, *Focus*, 9.

develops the type through manipulated sight and pre-formed assumptions. Indeed, his confidence in “supplying” obscured features that his eyes have not seen evokes the operations of other racial types, such as Galton’s, which used composite printing technology to create images of “typical” Jewish features—features that did not necessarily exist on any single photographic subject’s face. Beyond Galton, photographic images of racial types in general claimed to render available and visible that which is otherwise invisible: histories that precede the photographic moment, or the individual’s racial essence.³⁰¹ Here too, Newman champions his own powers of sight in order to gain access to that which is invisible.

Newman fancies himself an expert in typologies, because his job of hiring consists of identifying—and weeding out—Jewish candidates. Throughout the novel, even though Black Americans, like Jews, are often the targets of his bigoted thoughts (and he repeatedly compares his resentment toward these two groups of people), he also differentiates between them—and between his knowledge of each. For instance, on the very same train ride in the opening scene, he ponders over a Black face without any purported expertise, deciding that, “Some day he must look into the various types of niggers. It was academic, he knew, for he did not need the information for his work, but still...”³⁰² Implicit in Newman’s thought is the assumption that he would never accept any Black candidates, and that he feels confident identifying them without the help of thorough typological assessment. In this moment, he exhibits the possibility of a racialized gaze through operations other than the systematized, scientized typology he uses on Jews. The above passage puts into relief two significant and interconnected points about

³⁰¹ This is supported by my study of types in racial photography in the previous chapter of the dissertation. “Through photography,” as Edwards argues, “the ‘type,’ the abstract essence of human variation, was perceived to be an observable reality.” qtd Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 47.

³⁰² Miller, *Focus*, 9.

Newman's American brand of typological knowledge. First, the Jewish type is not triangulated discursively through a notion of Blackness, as it is represented in *Family Carnovsky*; rather, these are posed as two separate (albeit fantastical) forms of racial knowledge. Second, the novel distinguishes here between the social realities of anti-Black discrimination and anti-Semitic discrimination.

Not only does the novel portray Jews as having a degree of access to middle class jobs for which Black candidates would never be considered, but it also suggests that Jewish typology is utilized because of an understanding of Jews as less immediately discernible as Jews. This idea that typology is necessary because of visual ambiguity or obfuscation echoes the fictional claim in the case of Jegor Carnovsky's "mongrelization," that the Jewish strain, or the "Negroid-Semitic type" insidiously masks itself behind a "Nordic type." In Singer's novel, the anti-Semitic character instructs an audience in performing a scientific, typological process of looking in order to make this "Negroid-Semitic type" visible in Jegor's inscrutable, Jewish-descended body. Yet in *Focus*, Newman and his colleagues more often presume that Jewish individuals conceal their identities behind the mask of changed names. Newman enacts typological work upon Jews because of their seemingly dangerous proximity to the category of whiteness. Thus, the changed Jewish name serves as a screen obfuscating Jewishness, and consequently as the mandate for the interviewer to enact a process of typological discernment.

Furthermore, *Focus* presents the extent to which face and name scrutiny are mutually dependent. Articulating the suspicion of a changed Jewish name can kick off the process of face scrutiny, or reveal that it has already occurred. After Newman hires Miss Kapp, his boss yells at him, "Miss Kapp is obviously not our type of person, Newman. I mean, she's obvious. Her name

must be Kapinsky or something.”³⁰³ Although Miss Kapp’s identity technically remains unknown in the novel, by observing the “obviousness” of her visual type, the boss, Mr. Gargan, claims he is able to discern her Jewishness. He then articulates this through the verbal code of Jewish names. Like the unseen mouth of the man on the train, which Newman confidently supplies himself, Mr. Gargan is able to supply the supposedly erased Jewish suffix to complete his verbal image of the Jew. Both summon invisible elements and label their productions as exposure. Yet this process also allows for certain silences: Newman’s boss later tells him of Miss Kapp, “We just aren’t set up to take that kind of person.”³⁰⁴ That “kind” of person, he means, is Jewish. Yet the very word, *kind* just like *type*, stands in for *Jew*: a word never uttered aloud. Nearly identical language appears in Hobson’s *Gentleman’s Agreement*, when characters refer to not wanting “practically any type” to apply to work at their company, or explain that they seek out “the type that fits in.”³⁰⁵ Ironically, using the multivalent word, “type” allows the employer to verbally obfuscate—in this case, discrimination—as well. Much like *Focus*, *Gentleman’s Agreement* toggles between using the word “type” to definitively identify Jewish racial difference and using the same word to avoid articulating it.

Nevertheless, the novel continues to present visual, racial typology as a technique mobilized in the face of ambiguous Jewish physical distinctiveness. After Miss Kapp is dismissed, and Newman begins wearing glasses, he is determined once again to apply his

³⁰³ Miller, 17.

³⁰⁴ Miller, 17.

³⁰⁵ This language appears in *Gentleman’s Agreement*, when Miss Wales is less than pleased to learn that her story of name changing causes the magazine to publish a job posting inviting candidates of any religion to apply. She asks her boss, Phil in disbelief, “You mean practically inviting any type to apply?” Hobson, *Gentleman’s Agreement*, 154 Her reaction echoes the words of the Smith’s hiring manager Jordan in defense of his own practice—“If a girl’s personality is the type that fits in, I’d never ask” (Hobson 142).

typological skills and find the perfect-looking woman to fill the newly vacated role. The Episcopalian Gertrude Hart, who eventually becomes Newman's girlfriend, comes in for an interview. Newman is beguiled by her appearance and self-presentation. He becomes determined to discern whether or not she is Jewish based on her facial features, voice, and clothing, even though her résumé claims that she was born Episcopalian. He assesses her as Jewish and dismisses her. However, speaking within the elliptical discourse of "kinds" and "types," he does not tell her that this suspicion is the reason why he will not hire her. Instead, he tells her only that she lacks experience using the electric typing machines that the company will acquire in great number after the war. (In this pun, the issue is not her *type* but her ability *to type*.)

Through Miss Hart, Miller's novel highlights the significance of the Jewish gaze for creating Jewish types. When they meet, Newman's desire for Miss Hart mixes with his attempt to type her as they establish an ambiguous form of intimacy through a cycle of mutual looking. When he dismisses her, he stokes her ire, causing her to look at him in such a way that suggests to him that she believes *him* to be Jewish. This look contributes to his growing paranoia that he might appear Jewish in his new glasses. He thinks,

"There was something in her eyes...in the way she sat so angrily confident waiting for him to reply. She was not moving, glaring at him...The intimacy...that's what frightened him...yes, the intimacy was new. Her malevolence was intimate. She sat there as though she knew everything about him, as though...She was taking him for a Jew."³⁰⁶

Overcome by this realization, Newman thinks, "She must not do that with her eyes!" Later, he recalls that, "for in this moment her eyes made a Jew of him."³⁰⁷ Curiously—circularly—

³⁰⁶ Miller, *Focus*, 32.

³⁰⁷ Miller, 34 Newman's feeling that others' gazes and actions toward him have "made a Jew of him," can admittedly be read as anticipating Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of antisemitism articulated in *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1946): that the anti-Semite creates the Jew. I'd suggest that we can achieve a more nuanced reading of *Focus* by not chalking the novel up to this thesis. For an example of a novel that more clearly takes up Sartre's idea as one of its

according to Newman, her gaze upon him establishes *him* as a Jew as much as it establishes *her* as one: for this intimate knowledge that he locates in her gaze would only be possible if she were a Jew herself. Newman's investment in the power of the Jew's gaze echoes the biological discourse elaborated by scientists such as Francis Galton, Joseph Jacobs, and Maurice Fishberg, discussed in the previous chapter. Like these scientists, Newman suggests that it is not only the typological process of looking, but also the gaze of the typological subject (the Jew) that has the power to create a Jewish type. In this fictional scene, Newman believes that Gertrude's eyes have the power to simultaneously "*make* a Jew of him," and *reveal* the Jew in her. The scene of a circular, joint typology dramatizes the bidirectional power of the gaze in Jewish typological discourse.

Eventually, when Newman looks at her face and no longer sees in it the Jewish type, he reflects that, "It was like seeing a face in a movie change and dissolve, taking on a new character, and yet remaining the same face."³⁰⁸ The interaction thus reflects visual technology's ability to manipulate or call into question the stability of sight and perception, much like the description of Jegor in *Family Carnovsky*, who sees two shifting faces, doubled and simultaneous, when he looks at the face of the Nazi Dr. Zerbe. Miller's novel concerns not only discernment of facial features, but visual technology as well, echoing the previous chapter's discussion of photography's role in cultivating Jewish typological discourse. *Focus*, in its title, refers to the near-magical effect that glasses have upon the appearance of Newman's face—or in other words, his face through a lens. As Miller explains of the novel, "Its central image is *the*

foundational ideas, see Howard Jacobson's more recent, Booker-Prize winning, comic British novel, *The Finkler Question* (2010).

³⁰⁸ Miller, 82.

turning lens of the mind of an anti-Semitic man forced by his circumstances to see anew his own relationships to the Jew.”³⁰⁹

The novel highlights various visual technologies, including photography. For instance, Newman creates a quasi camera obscura in the scene in which he first sees his own image in his glasses. The scene consists of a gradual process of repeated looking at himself in his bathroom mirror. Newman focuses his newly bespectacled eyes like the lens of a camera: at first, “the mercurial blur swirled before his eyes,” but eventually “the whole frame of the mirror became astonishingly clear.”³¹⁰ He looks at his various features in the mirror before he concludes that, “He was looking at what might very well be described as the face of a Jew. A Jew, in effect, had gotten into his bathroom...”³¹¹ And this alchemical effect as a whole leads to a moment of near transcendence as Newman, “felt as though rising off the floor.”³¹² He attempts to smile in the mirror, but it is “the smile of one who is forced to pose before the camera.”³¹³ Newman becomes at once the awestruck photographer and the coerced photographic subject in his own bathroom-turned-camera-obscura where he creates his own Jewish type. In this key scene, it is not only the typological process of looking, but the mimicked conditions of visual technology, which allow Newman to become a Jewish type.

Newman’s self-assessment in this scene includes repeated attempts at phenotypic description through catalogues of his facial features, which bear a circular relationship to his understanding of the “Jew, in effect” or as a whole. The question of the whole versus the parts

³⁰⁹ Miller, “Introduction,” x.

³¹⁰ Miller, *Focus*, 25.

³¹¹ Miller, 24.

³¹² Miller, 24.

³¹³ Miller, 25.

replays the paradox of Jewish types as outlined by Fishberg. Newman teases out this tension: “A long time he stood staring at himself, at his forehead, his chin, his nose. It took many moments of detailed inspection of his parts before he could see himself whole.”³¹⁴ Switching between looking in the mirror with and without the clarity of his glasses, he sees the distortion of his pre-formed mental self-image, which had made him believe that these glasses would make him appear like a, “Hindenburg type of Jew,” because of his “flat vertical cheeks and a squarish head and very fair skin, and—most telling—suggestions of bags under his eyes, the stern Hindenburg pouches.”³¹⁵ In this list, he uses similar phenotypic criteria to those used for the Jewish typology created on the train. However, with his glasses on—both as instruments of clearer vision and as a prosthetic facial feature—all of his facial elements seem to be drawn forward. His facial expression (that awkward smile for the camera) comes to appear insincere and cunning, because of “the Semitic prominence of his nose, the bulging set of his eyes, the listening posture of his ears.”³¹⁶ In Newman’s repeated looking and reading of his face, he oscillates between interpreting the whole in light of the parts, and the parts in light of the whole. His cycles of looking and discerning dramatize the very circularity of the typological process: a process of discursive circling around an ambiguous central object. As we have seen, this very discourse produces the type.

Even earlier in the novel, Newman acknowledges the extent to which the practice of reading another’s face for racial essence or spiritual characteristics is an act of projection. He feels guilty that, “The evil nature of the Jews and their numberless deceits, especially their sensuous lust for women—of which fact he had seen daily proof in the dark folds of their eyes

³¹⁴ Miller, 24.

³¹⁵ Miller, 25.

³¹⁶ Miller, 25.

and their swarthy skin—all were the reflections of his own desires with which he had invested them.”³¹⁷ In other words, he maintains that he has seen their internal characteristics expressed in external traits (their “evil nature” in the “dark folds of their eyes and their swarthy skin”). However, he only sees them because he puts them there. With this admission, the novel starts to contest the authority of visual perception itself.

Upon his own typological transformation, Newman comes to reject typology, which is narrated as a surreal triumph. In his eventual rejection of typology, he explicitly refutes typological knowledge as it was constructed by race scientists beginning in the 19th century. Newman insists to himself that the glasses have created a false type, that he is not in fact a Jew, even though as we have seen, Newman repeatedly creates types (including his own). Once turned upon himself, these visual operations come into question. He at one point ponders, “Was it possible...that [an employer] looked at me and thought me untrustworthy, or grasping, or loud because of my face?”³¹⁸ He also eventually negates racial typology’s promise to draw history visibly on the face, as he thinks, “He was *him*, a human being with a certain definite history, and he was not this face which looked like it had grown out of another alien and dirty history.”³¹⁹ This negation—“he was not this face”—attempts to decouple the coordination drawn between “*him*, a human being,” and a particular facial type within physiognomy and racial typology. With his new, bespectacled face, Newman does not merely come to understand the sting of anti-Semitic hatred, he also comes to re-assess typology’s intellectual hold on him. In this novel’s central transformation, Newman must reform his biological imagination.

³¹⁷ Miller, 34.

³¹⁸ Miller, 67.

³¹⁹ Miller, 67.

In moments such as these, the fictional elaboration and undermining of the typological process provides the force of Miller's particular critique-through-exposure of American antisemitism. The repeated scenes of typological production in this novel (so similar to what we might find in *Family Carnovsky's* German scenes) suggest that American antisemitism is also deeply rooted in visibility and is only unique in its insistence on being unspoken or verbally obfuscated. In both contexts, antisemitism is tied to the process of visible discernment and the reliance on scientifically originated forms of knowledge.³²⁰ Through its dramatization of typology, *Focus* undermines the assumption that America's social antisemitism is a unique phenomenon, separable from more explicitly racialized forms of antisemitism in Europe, or independent of biological imagination.

The very emphasis on visibility and Jewish physical distinctiveness might also be key to the novel's relative critical forgetting. As Mesher pointed out in 1980 about the novel's reception up to that point, "Liberal critics, many themselves Jews, who would normally be in sympathy with the novel's aims, had long ago rejected the racist notion that people 'looked Jewish' and, therefore, discounted the novel's credibility."³²¹ Therefore, the novel's reach may have been limited by the very grounds upon which it attempts to critique antisemitism. Ironically, because of the success of *Focus* and texts like it in establishing a new standard of acceptable discourse about Jewish visible or physical distinctiveness, this narrative of re-forming of biological

³²⁰ This comparison is mostly implicit. The novel explicitly references European antisemitism several times, but as stories (or films) witnessed by the characters. Miller would later come to dramatize the Holocaust more explicitly in several plays, including *After the Fall* (1964) and *Playing for Time*, *Incident at Vichy* (1964). For more on Miller's work dealing with the Holocaust see Janet N Balakian, "The Holocaust, the Depression, and McCarthyism: Miller in the Sixties," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller*, ed. Christopher Bigsby, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 118–40.

³²¹ Mesher, "Arthur Miller's 'Focus,'" 474.

imagination seems to have lost its legitimacy or political “relevance” in the culture it helped initiate.

Making a Gentleman’s Agreement

Laura Z. Hobson’s novel *Gentleman’s Agreement* (1947) likely has had the greatest cultural footprint of any of the novels explored in this chapter. Its closely followed film adaptation (also 1947) starring Dorothy McGuire and Gregory Peck, won three Academy Awards, including the award for Best Picture. The novel tells the story of Phil Green, a genteel journalist in New York City who decides to pose as Jewish in order to experience and expose antisemitism for a liberal magazine, *Smith’s* (a name that is markedly not Jewish, and might as well be, “*Everyman Weekly*”). Modeling his journalistic technique after previous assignments where he imbedded himself with migrant farm workers and miners, Phil decides to move through the world as a Jew (meaning, to tell people that he is Jewish) and to write a story titled, “I was Jewish for three months.” The novel is also in some ways a conventional love story, between the journalist Phil and the socialite Kathy Lacey, a relative of the magazine’s editor who both avowedly “hates” antisemitism (she even came up with the idea for the exposé) and quite apparently harbors anti-Jewish biases (or at least tacitly supports Jewish exclusion in upscale resorts and suburbs). The romantic relationship with Kathy is the greatest cause of the tension during Phil’s journalistic “experiment.”

Phil’s piece, like the novel itself, has two significantly interlocking theses. First, the goal of his article is to expose antisemitism by making both himself and his readers attuned to the indignities large and small, which come with being Jewish in 1940s America, or as he puts it, “every day the thump of insult, the assault on your dignity,” and “day by day the tapping on the

nerves, the delicate assault on the proud stuff of a man's identity."³²² Second, the feat of his experiment is also to show how *little* it would take for a gentile to pass as a Jew, and to debunk the idea of a Jewish look or physical type. Therefore, the novel presents as interdependent the dismantling of antisemitism and the disavowal of a visible Jewish type. A larger aim is to protect America from communism: Phil believes that eliminating bias is necessary if American liberalism is going to be as appealing to the downtrodden as communism might be. Yet of course, this view of social inclusion and equality is limited in so far as it is predicated on *physical likeness* and interchangeability.

Re-framing Jewish Difference

Gentleman's Agreement as a whole is fixated on the question of Jewish difference: it asks whether such difference exists at all, and if so, how to categorize it. The very story presents what Benjamin Schreier has called "a shift in the significance and functionality of Jewish categoricalness," broadly speaking, from a construction of Jewish difference as a matter of race to a matter of religion in the postwar period.³²³ In the novel, Phil—who is unequivocally presented as a moral guide for characters and for readers alike—often thinks about his childhood friend Dave who was, "like him in every essential...Dave as a man, and not Dave as a Jew. Dave as a citizen, as American, and not Dave as a religious being. That, Phil was sure of. And that was good."³²⁴ Valuing essential likeness as such, the novel often pursues sameness because it equates

³²² Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 118, 97.

³²³ Benjamin Schreier, "Filming Identity in the Jewish American Postwar; or, on the Uses and Abuses of Periodization for Jewish Studies," *Shofar*, 34, no. 3 (Spring 2016): 83–84 For more on the active framing of Jews as a religious group, see for instance: Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews*; Andrew R. Heinze, *Jews and the American Soul*.

³²⁴ Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 52.

any suggestion of difference with hierarchy—Jewish difference cannot be difference without Christian superiority.³²⁵ Any idea of Jewish culture is also disregarded, except for one humorous moment in which Phil’s magazine editor—in response to an off-handed comment about “Jewish publishing houses”—claims to know nothing of the many publishing houses owned and operated by Jews in America, and states that the only publishing house that one could conceivably label “Jewish” would be the publisher of the Yiddish *Forward*.³²⁶ The novel presents little other possibility of secular Jewish culture or experience outside of internalized antisemitism.

Gentleman’s Agreement debunks external difference as well. Within this project, the novel aims to remove Jews from racial discourse, not by critiquing the field of knowledge writ large, but by using scientific racial discourse. This tack echoes the 1911 argument that Maurice Fishberg mounted against the Jewish type without challenging racial typology as a whole, and constitutes what Matthew Frye Jacobson has labeled the novel’s, “ideological move toward re-racialization.”³²⁷ Phil repeatedly lectures other characters about the myth of the Jewish race, which modern science has disproven. Phil even shows Kathy a pamphlet written by leading anthropologists (citing Margaret Mead, Franz Boas, and the like) titled, “There is No Jewish ‘Race,’” but which still supports the schema that “the three great divisions of mankind were the Caucasian Race, the Mongoloid, the Negroid.”³²⁸ These scientific citations further crystalize the novel’s larger, limited perspective on race and racism. As Jacobson rightly argues, “Wholely

³²⁵ The novel’s perspective on religious pluralism is delivered by Phil in a lecture to his son about different kinds of churches and anticipates the thesis of Will Herberg’s *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (1955).

³²⁶ Hobson, *Gentleman’s Agreement*, 254; This is perhaps the only moment in the entire novel when Hobson points up Jewish culture, or hints that she is imbedded in a Jewish cultural or literary world. In fact, her parents were both involved in Yiddish journalism: her mother wrote for the newspaper *Der tog*, and her father was a founder of the *Forverts*. Gordan, “Laura Z. Hobson and the Making of *Gentleman’s Agreement*,” 236–37.

³²⁷ Jacobson, “Becoming Caucasian,” 93.

³²⁸ Hobson, *Gentleman’s Agreement*, 197.

[sic] outside the novel's moral compass are cases where questions of 'difference' and justice cannot be resolved by an argument of 'sameness' indicated by literal interchangeability [sic]."³²⁹ Characters believe that "beating" antisemitism is a "much easier" stepping stone to "getting decent with" Black Americans, who at the time faced far greater legal discrimination and segregation than Jewish Americans, not only in the Jim Crow South, but also in Northern cities such as New York.³³⁰ However, the novel's characters believe in this stepping stone, in part, because they also support that race is substantively real and that (Ashkenazi) Jews belong in the "Caucasian Race."

While the novel is full of references to what it might mean to "look Jewish," it also implies that merely knowing or expecting that someone is Jewish is enough to initiate a process of typological sight, and thus establish them as visibly Jewish. This is the conceit of Phil's experiment: "He'd be the same guy, the same face, the same voice, manner, tweed suit, same eyes, nose, body," yet all it should take is telling people that he's Jewish for him to *appear* Jewish.³³¹ Some colleagues even note, "There's that Jewish something when he smiles, around the mouth," once the rumor of his Jewishness spreads.³³² Phil also thinks often about Dave's appearance, and as he studies Dave's face one evening, he ponders, "Where was it, this Jewishness?" Unable to land on any specific feature, he nonetheless decides, "If you thought, you'd know this man was Jewish. It was there somewhere. In the indented arcs of the nostrils? In the turn of his lips? In the quiet eyes?"³³³ This continues the "paradox of Jewish types." The

³²⁹ Jacobson, "Becoming Caucasian," 96.

³³⁰ Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 184.

³³¹ Hobson, 84.

³³² Hobson, 158.

³³³ Hobson, 130–31.

inability to determine a particular facial trait as Jewish will not shake his confidence that he can visually determine an entire face as Jewish. Likewise, perhaps as a foreshadow, the novel's Jewish character who passes as a gentile, Miss Wales (née Walovsky), initiates typological assessment. Phil wonders about her, "Her high cheekbones made her seem Scandinavian, Slavic, something foreign and interesting."³³⁴ However, acknowledging that his thought process had been racial, Phil quickly pauses and mocks himself, "the Nordic type; the Aryan type"; he then determines to seek out an article that, "*Life* ran a couple of years ago by Hooton of Harvard about the balderdash of race and types" for research.³³⁵ Balderdash it may be, but Phil is practiced in this form of seeing, which as late as 1939 circulated in popular publications such as *Life*. *Gentleman's Agreement*, like the other novels discussed in this chapter, narrates the familiar pattern of typological sight and racial determination, which was mediated by the popular circulation of scientific knowledge.

Other instances suggest that "looking Jewish" is not a matter of phenotype but is the product of a vulgar brand of self-presentation, particular to Jewish women. There persisted a common perception from as early as the 1920s, that Jewish women were excessively made-up,

³³⁴ Hobson, 99.

³³⁵ Hobson, 101–2; The physical anthropologist Earnest Hooton did not actually write an article in *Life* magazine, but this moment is likely referring to a real profile that the photojournalistic weekly on August 7th, 1939 about Hooton and his work. While nothing is written of a Jewish type at all in the article or in the graphs, there is one separate graphic, which is the only of its kind in the piece. The image breaks down the origins of the "Jewish Face," and its caption explains that the, "Jewish face is derived from a mixture of other strains as this drawing by Hooton shows. Jews owe their intellectual superiority, Hooton thinks, to the fact that persecution has eliminated their morons. Urging intermarriage as a solution to the problem, he says, 'a little [Jewish blood] would have improved the shape of my nose'" (65). This caption is admittedly perplexing. What exactly is the problem to be solved? What can be seen from these drawings about the problem or the solution posed by the Jewish face? And yet, this very graphic and caption, in their precise lack of context exemplifies that even in one of the most widely circulated publications in the United States, one could find such eugenic material and such notions of a Jewish race and a Jewish face. Walter Stockley, "Hooton of Harvard," *Life* (Meredith Corporation, August 7, 1939).

loud, and gaudy “ghetto girls,” as described by Riv-Ellen Prell.³³⁶ In the novel *Kathy*, the novel’s proxy for the White Anglo Saxon Protestant upper class, uses self-presentation markers to visually identify Jewish women while out skiing. Perhaps she identifies them aurally: she first hears two women’s accented speech, one of which speaks in a “strident voice.” They are also coming from a beginner’s ski slope, suggesting new access to wealth and leisure activities. Even more troubling for Kathy, they wear shiny costume jewelry and thick makeup that “cracks” and “congeals,” and freezes in beads—ill-suited for the outdoor sport. Kathy thinks, “Why do they *do* it? she thought miserably. Why do they make themselves so noticeable? It’s awful. It’s just awful...All Jews aren’t vulgar and overdressed.” She regrets the “injustice that taxed a whole group for the offense of two ill-bred girls,” and lauds herself for this enlightened view.³³⁷ Even though the narrative circuits through her internal monologue, it never states her conclusion explicitly that she has detected or read these women as Jewish—but, of course, this is what has happened. The interaction later causes her to look around the tastefully presented patrons at her genteel ski resort and note regretfully that “There was not one face that was obviously ‘Jewish.’”³³⁸ It would have been suitable to Kathy to find “obviously ‘Jewish’” faces, so long as their makeup and clothing were more tasteful.

The relationship is not so clear-cut between manners and self-presentation and racialization in the novel. As Gordan has noted, “appearance and manners” loom large “in Hobson’s solution to the problem of antisemitism.”³³⁹ Even the Jewish Miss Wales describes

³³⁶ Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans*, 22.

³³⁷ Hobson, *Gentleman’s Agreement*, 242–43.

³³⁸ Hobson, 244.

³³⁹ Gordan, “Laura Z. Hobson and the Making of *Gentleman’s Agreement*,” 238.

Jewish women who are “loud” and “wear too much rouge” as “the kikey ones,” for whom more palatable Jews like herself and Phil Green must “be the fall.”³⁴⁰ In response to her comment, Phil, enraged at her distinction among Jews, says “You mean because we don’t look especially Jewish,” and then thinks to himself that it is because the two of them are “‘white’ Jews.”³⁴¹ The characters closely link “whiteness” with the absence of Jewish vulgarity. So too, in Kathy’s trip to the ski lodge, we can infer a racialized gaze: an implicit visual process that allows her to identify faces as either “obviously ‘Jewish’” or not. The novel clearly favors a change in visual practice over Kathy’s project of respectability. While Kathy hopes for a change in others’ self-presentation in order to make themselves racially un-marked, Phil hopes to change his own processes of perception.

Re-Disciplining the Biological Imagination

In large part, the novel’s critique of the visible Jewish type functions not so much by denying the “Jewish type” or Jewish visual distinctiveness, but by narrating the process of un-learning these ideas. Whereas Kathy could not help but see the strident-voiced, gloopy-eyed women on the ski slopes and identify them as Jews (even if she believed them *not* to be representative), the novel demonstrates how Phil makes use of and rejects racial typology. Facial characteristics are not invisible to him, nor to the novel. It witnesses them, reproduces them, and then claims that they are of no importance. One Jewish character, Dr. Lieberman is described as short and stout, “with the face of a Jew in a Nazi cartoon, the beaked nose, the blue jowls, and the curling black hair. Phil saw all of it, and the fine candid eyes.”³⁴² Detail by phenotypic detail,

³⁴⁰ Hobson, *Gentleman’s Agreement*, 154.

³⁴¹ Hobson, 155.

³⁴² Hobson, 122.

the novel corroborates the “Nazi” caricature’s depiction through realist description (although the association between Jews and hooked noses was by no means a Nazi invention³⁴³). The novel narrates Phil’s experience of seeing through the lens of a racist caricature (“Phil saw all of it”). He, however, is able to see the individual (his “fine and candid eyes”), despite the conditioning of the propaganda image. Phil enacts, but resists, the typological process of seeing. In other words, he is un-learning typology. If, as Jacobson notes, Hobson’s “novel is...intricately laced through with the twin themes of ‘looking Jewish’ and ‘seeing Jews,’” then it also repeatedly shows how its characters contest the construction of these very themes.³⁴⁴

At the same time as the novel proposes Phil’s experiment to unearth antisemitism and disprove the “Jewish type,” Dr. Lieberman engages in a converse “research project,” which also attempts to re-discipline typological sight. Their two experiments, which they discuss “as though they were colleagues in a laboratory,” highlight the ambivalent attitude of the novel about Jewish visual distinctiveness.³⁴⁵ While Phil, a non-Jew, convinces people that he is Jewish with considerable ease, Dr. Lieberman, a Jew, can only convince people that he is *not* Jewish with

³⁴³ The Jewish nose is one of the best trodden features of Jewish physical distinctiveness. The drawing of a hooked nose would reasonably be associated with the Nazis in the context of this American, postwar novel, yet the image far predates them. See, for instance, Sara Lipton, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography* (Henry Holt and Company, 2014); The hooked nose came into race scientific discourse as well, as the social scientist Joseph Jacobs, discussed in the previous chapter writes, regarding the noses on Francis Galton’s composite photographic types in relation to caricaturists, “Artists tell us that the best way to make a caricature of the Jewish nose is to write a figure 6 with a long tail...” Galton, “Photographic Composites,” 268 Galton’s comment was published alongside a now famous, often reproduced image of three noses labeled scientifically as “Figures” one through three. The image is reproduced, for instance, in the entry in the Jewish Encyclopedia under “Jewish nose,” in which Jacobs and Fishberg conducted a study to determine that the stereotypical “Jewish nose” does not in fact occur in higher frequency among Jews. Joseph Jacobs and Maurice Fishberg, “Nose,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (Funk and Wagnalls, June 1901), 338, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11598-nose#anchor1> Later, this idea of a Jewish nose resembling the shape of a “6” was disseminated in Nazi propaganda as a way to instruct children how to identify Jews, for instance in the children’s book *Der Giftpilz* (The Toadstool/Poisonous Mushroom) by Ernst Hiemer, published by Der Sturmer publisher Julius Striecher. .

³⁴⁴ Jacobson, “Becoming Caucasian,” 92.

³⁴⁵ Hobson, *Gentleman’s Agreement*, 252.

considerable difficulty. Describing his crusade, Dr. Lieberman says, “I will go forth and state flatly, ‘I am not a Jew.’...With this face that becomes not an evasion but a new principle. A scientific principle.”³⁴⁶ Dr. Lieberman implies that it would be impossible for him to attempt to “pass” as a non-Jew, because of the obviousness of his facial appearance. Instead, his statement is designed to challenge people to see “a Jew” as a religious, rather than scientific or racial categorization. After all, he states,

“I have no religion, so I am not Jewish by religion. Further, I am a scientist, so I must rely on science which tells me I am not Jewish by race since there’s no such thing as a distinct Jewish race. As for ethnic group or Jewish type, we know I fit perfectly the Syrian or Turkish or Egyptian type—there’s no such thing, anthropologically, as the Jewish type.”³⁴⁷

By discursively shifting the categorical status of “Jewish” from race to religion, Dr. Lieberman also attempts to disentangle Jewish physical distinctiveness from the scientific, visual process of typology. He thus challenges onlookers (and readers) to develop a new practice of non-typological sight.

Gentleman’s Agreement wields scientific authority in order to extract Jewishness from racial discourse—and from biological discourse more generally. For this reason, it seems utterly surprising that Phil simultaneously attempts to figure his experiment—both metaphorically and literally—through biological imagination. In particular, he uses biology to conceive of the relationship between his brief experiment and the experience of antisemitism over the entire course of Jewish history, and over the entire course of a life. At one point he says to Dave that experiencing a lifetime of antisemitism “must be worse on the organism...to drag it out year after year.”³⁴⁸ Phil frames his own experience as akin to recapitulation—the evolutionary theory

³⁴⁶ Hobson, 212.

³⁴⁷ Hobson, 212.

³⁴⁸ Hobson, 183.

that a fetus in utero moves through each stage of its species' development—the same theory that Mary Antin references when she suggests that the inner drama she experiences upon eating un-kosher meat reenacts civilization's development. Phil posits his rationale for “becoming” a Jew as, “Just as the embryo in the womb reproduced in nine months the whole evolutionary process of the race, maybe he could reproduce in himself in a short time the whole history of persecution.”³⁴⁹ Recapitulation thus serves as a model for his project of understanding Jewish subjectivity through a compressed reproduction of history.

Phil imagines that he can reproduce a process of reproduction, doubling his biological metaphor. Phil becomes a Jew, as an embryo becomes an infant, as a tadpole becomes a human. In this conceptualization, Phil associates Jewish subjectivity with the “whole history of persecution.” Moreover, the desire to reproduce this history in a brief period of time echoes the typological impulse to look at a Jewish face and “traverse the aeons of time,” or to find, “the stamp of a longer, more complex heredity...the brand of suffering,” expressed by Joseph Jacobs and Israel Zangwill, respectively.³⁵⁰ Of course, for Phil this reproduction of a long history over a brief period of time would be strictly felt in his body, and not seen typologically in his face.

Tracing this biological metaphor for Phil's experiment across the novel, we witness again the re-disciplining of his own biological imagination. Phil eventually rejects his initial idea that one could come to understand discrimination over the same time period as human gestation. He fumes, “Maybe the slow embryo in the patient womb needed nine months to reproduce the sweep from tadpole to man, but no such time was needed to re-create the reaction to prejudice. He'd been a fool that night, a fancy maker of metaphor and simile. Whole history of persecution

³⁴⁹ Hobson, 67.

³⁵⁰ Jacobs, “The Jewish Type and Galton's Composite Photographs,” 269; Zangwill, qtd. Fishberg, *The Jews*, 99.

indeed.”³⁵¹ If much of the novel’s thesis is dedicated to undermining the scientific or empirical basis of Jewish *visual* distinctiveness, then this moment reflects an interest in debunking a notion of *inherited* biological difference more broadly. Phil continues, “He’d forgotten that the inheritance of acquired characteristics was a myth. The baby born in the ghetto was as free of the history of persecution as it was free of his father’s skill at making neckties or mathematical formulae. But these teachers were soon met, and they taught their devious lessons rapidly as well.”³⁵² Jewish subjectivity, according to Phil’s two-week experiment, owes itself to the continued presence of discrimination, rather than an inherited history of persecution.³⁵³ Most significantly, this internal monologue narrates Phil revising a biological metaphor. Even though he knows them to be “myth,” the concepts of recapitulation and soft inheritance linger in his imagination. This is a moment of engaging, rupturing, and re-disciplining the biological imagination, in response to the cultural and historical moment. *Gentleman’s Agreement*, as a didactic “problem novel” that uses sentimentality to initiate social change, models this re-disciplining so as to change the reader as well.

Phil by no means rejects biological imagination writ large at that moment. He instead continues to frame his experience in terms of bodily, biological change. He describes that very change he registers within himself over the course of only two weeks as, “A mutation had been produced in the bunched nerves, in the eardrums that caught nuance, in the very corneas that gave him sight.”³⁵⁴ Although Phil curses himself for being “a fancy maker of metaphor and

³⁵¹ Hobson, *Gentleman’s Agreement*, 119.

³⁵² Hobson, 119.

³⁵³ For more cultural and literary reactions to inheritance of acquired traits, or “soft inheritance,” in the form of epigenetics, see Chapter 4.

³⁵⁴ Hobson, *Gentleman’s Agreement*, 119.

simile,” he takes issue, not with the biological framework itself, but its mere use as metaphor. Put another way, he emphasizes the production rather than simulated reproduction of bodily change: he had imagined that evolutionary change would be modeled, or *reproduced* during his experiment, but instead he found that a mutation has been *produced*. He, along with Dr. Lieberman, rejects Jewishness as a biological fact, but he comes to determine the Jewishness of his body biologically. Jewishness develops through his embodied experiences, divorced from the concept of inheritance.

Phil’s now biologically Jewish body is established, not by what others can perceive about him, but by the ways that his body is able to perceive (his bunched nerves, his eardrums, his corneas). Ironically, this new biologically Jewish body—or body that now perceives “Jewishly”—resonates with prior, established motifs used to understand Jewish visual distinctiveness. Phil’s Jewish perception (or ability to perceive Jewishly) maps rather nicely onto the circular notion of a Jewish gaze perpetuated in typological racial photography. This is the very idea expressed in Miller’s *Focus*, when Newman imagines that the special gaze of the Jew can also “make a Jew of him.” Phil indeed revises that concept through the biological framework of “mutation.” In a sense, framing this new ability as a physical mutation doubles down on the scientific validity of a Jewish gaze or Jewish mode of perception. Despite the novel’s optimistic arc, showing that typology can be dismantled through the re-disciplining of the biological imagination, it seems that this new discipline may amount to little more than re-naming the assumptions and processes of typological sight that the characters had set out to debunk.

The imagery in these fictional passages is strikingly similar to a moment in a 1944 letter to Hobson from her editor Lee Wright at Simon and Schuster (who was also Jewish). In the letter, Wright tries to discourage Hobson from writing the book about a gentile who passes as a

Jew, which would become *Gentleman's Agreement*. She writes, "...But you who are writing this book, are a Jew. How can you put yourself in his place? There are generations of philosophic submission in your blood and bones. You were born with an instinctive acceptance of a special place in the world. He would be hurt more deeply and in a special way than a Jew would be hurt, because he would be both the victim and the persecutor."³⁵⁵ Gordan has recently uncovered this letter as evidence of the resistance Hobson faced from professional and personal associates when she expressed her plan to write a novel about antisemitism in the early 1940s. For the purposes of this argument though, the letter carries significance as a critique for which Hobson's passages about recapitulation and inherited traits may serve as preemptive rejoinders. These narrative moments are written over and against not only Hobson's earlier exchange with Wright, but also an entire discourse about biological Jewish inheritance and racial types. Indeed, the bodily imagery and the biologically imagined inheritance of Jewish suffering, or "philosophic submission," is at the heart of what Hobson is attempting to reframe for her readers when she models the dispensing of typological sight.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that for Jewish American authors writing in the 1940s, a key strategy for critiquing antisemitism at home and abroad was to dramatize the extent to which American anti-Semitic practices are performed visually and rooted in biological knowledge. In re-enacting the American myth that all differences are only "skin-deep," these authors present narratives in which characters reform their biological imaginations. This study has expanded upon the previous chapter, which argued that the photographic practice of producing Jewish

³⁵⁵ Wright, qtd. Gordan, "Laura Z. Hobson and the Making of *Gentleman's Agreement*," 247–48.

types was also informed by biology and circulated through American and Jewish American popular media. Fiction, too, attests to the popular application of these visual, scientific practices—or perhaps more precisely, practices which were culturally based and justified through scientific systematization. Such interplay in the cultural and literary lives of scientific ideas is precisely what I describe as the biological imagination. These novels, in English and Yiddish, written both before and after 1945, illustrate that authors were by no means squeamish about introducing the idea of biological Jewish inheritance or scientifically defined, Jewish physical distinctiveness into their literary works: on the contrary, scientific knowledge was central to critiquing antisemitism. In each of these works, the logical conclusion of such exposure would be the reforming—not the rejection—of the biological imagination.

While each novel employs these common themes of typology and race science, Singer's Yiddish novel—the only one completed before the full horror of the Holocaust unfolded—stands out for its relatively bleaker outlook. In *Family Carnovsky*, the dissolution of race science and a biological Jewishness is narrated in the mode of tragedy rather than triumph. By contrast, the English-language novels (especially *Gentleman's Agreement* and to a lesser extent, *Focus*) mount relatively hopeful arguments for Jewish inclusion in an American—notably, white—society, through warning calls that unearth the dangers of anti-Semitic race science and typology. The texts analyzed in this chapter all critique a form of biological race science that is now deemed “pseudoscience.” Indeed, these novels of the 1940s do not merely reflect that paradigm shift, but imaginatively will it.

The sources and ideas of these two chapters have also caused me to reconsider a personal story of my own. I hope readers will indulge me this foray into a piece of family lore, tantamount

to legend, about my now deceased great uncle, Samuel Ritvo. What follows is the transcription from an oral history interview I conducted with him when I was in the tenth grade:

“It’s quite interesting, when I graduated from medical school, you had to go in to the dean’s office to get your diploma because they didn’t hand them out at the graduation ceremony...so when I went in to get my diploma, the registrar, a very nice, elderly woman, Ms. Dacey was her name, she ran the dean’s office, she was the first one to call me ‘Dr. Ritvo,’ congratulated me, and she said—strangely—she said, ‘I remember the day your application came into this office.’ So I looked at her, I wondered why it was so memorable, and she went to the filing cabinet, took out my application, and tore off the photograph attached to it, and handed it to me, and said, ‘I looked at the photo, and thought, he doesn’t look like the ordinary kind of Jewish boy who wants to be a doctor, so I put it on the pile to call for interviews.’

“So that was a pretty stunning thing to hear. But what she didn’t know, you see, is that when I was applying, I knew I had to have a photograph, at those days, you could go to a machine, and for twenty-five cents, could get a cheap photograph, I thought, ‘well I’d better not do that, this was too important to risk on a poor photograph.’ So I took my last two or three dollars, and went to the most expensive photographer on Harvard Square...he had photos of the baseball team, and the football team, and socialites in his window. And I went in and I told him what I needed, and I said to him, ‘I know it isn’t easy, but you have to do the best you can for me.’ So he sat me down, looked at me from different angles, and he said, ‘I could make you look like a left tackle,’ and he did, so that’s the photo that got me into medical school.”

Before the interview I had already known about this photograph that had gotten Sam into Yale’s medical school in the late 1930s. Copies of the photograph hang in his daughter’s dining room and in a conference room dedicated to him at that same institution, where he worked for many decades. Sam, the American-born son of Jewish immigrants from Lithuania, related the story with good humor and laughed during our interview. And my family—his own children, sister, nephews—always seemed amused by the story and took pleasure in its punch lines, delivered both by the photographer and by the medical school registrar. “I could make you look like a left tackle.” “He doesn’t look like the ordinary kind of Jewish boy who wants to be a doctor.” Yet this story has always unsettled me: not only is this a reminder that institutions such as Yale tried to keep Jews out of its ranks (as is now a well-recorded pattern in elite institutions of American higher education in the early twentieth century), but also, barely beneath the surface of the story is an assumption that one can discern *the ordinary kind of Jewish boy* from looking

at a photograph. It would not be an exaggeration to state that Sam's success and the fate of his family depended on that image. And this to me, even when I lacked the language to articulate it, seemed frighteningly precarious. How could so much depend on one person's interpretation of your photograph?

I now believe that this story poignantly illustrates biological imagination, expressed through the framework of typological sight. The story of the registrar looking at Sam's photograph exemplifies the typological process of looking, as when the fictional Newman reads his own quasi-photographic image in the bathroom mirror—or when Joseph Jacobs interpreted Francis Galton's composite photographs, or when readers would have seen the photographic types published in *McClure's* within the article, "The Jewish Invasion of America." If these two chapters have demonstrated how Jewish types were created, conceived, and circulated, then this personal story suggests the implications of these visual practices for an individual's lived experience. Sam's is a story of photographic artifice and manipulation at the same time as it is a story about investments in photographic authority. Sam, attuned to the significance of photographic, facial scrutiny within the admissions process, invests his money in the photograph. So too, the registrar invests faith in Sam as a deserving prospective student because she is so confident in her reading of the photograph, and even recollects enacting this process of discernment, three years—and presumably hundreds of applicants—later. In fact, while the story's pleasure might derive from the irony of making Sam (a person who dealt his entire life with a physical disability) into the image of a football player, its complexity lies in the withholding of a reveal. The story as I have always heard it never suggests whether the registrar thought better of her initial reading of Sam's photograph upon meeting him in the flesh. Somehow, there existed an idea of a "Jewish type" captured, created, or denied by the camera

lens, as well as the process of discernment enacted by the registrar, which carried a unique authority.

I mention this story, in part because it thematically links the analysis of Jewish photographic types in the previous chapter to the narratives of name- and face-scrutiny in job applications in this one. It also illustrates personal investments in stories about the Jewish type, and even biology more generally. It suggests how people can enact or invoke biologically rooted processes, even if they do not intentionally hold them as “scientific fact” (much in the manner of Phil Green, who metaphorizes, then ultimately rejects, the concepts of recapitulation and soft inheritance). The next chapter will explore this phenomenon further, as it exists in the postwar and contemporary periods. In particular, I will investigate a not-often acknowledged ambivalence around the idea of an inherited Yiddish language, both for those who speak Yiddish and for those who do not. Perhaps it should go without saying that the idea that one can biologically inherit a language is magical thinking. And yet, as I will show, within the critical-artistic field of Queer Yiddish, political and emotional stances toward this very idea—and toward “biology” itself—are often at odds in complex and even fruitful ways.

Chapter 5 “Strange Creatures Who Must Grow Gills:” Between Queer and Heritable Models of Contemporary Yiddish Language and Culture”

In 1997, the Berkeley, California-based, radical queer Jewish journal, *Davka* published a then nearly decade-old poem by the bilingual Yiddish-English poet Irena Klepfisz, “*Etleche Verter Oyf Mame Loshn/A Few Words in the Mother Tongue*.”³⁵⁶ The poem has often been understood as not only bilingual and self-translating, but also as a *teacher* of Yiddish (a language also known as “*mame loshn*,” or in English, “mother tongue”). The poem, originally published in 1988, opens with what seems like a glossary, listing the Yiddish names for archetypes of Jewish womanhood and their English translations:

lemoshl: for example

di kurve the whore
a woman who acknowledges her passions

di yidene the Jewess the Jewish woman
ignorant overbearing
let’s face it: every woman is one

di yente the gossip the busybody
who knows what’s what
and is never caught off guard

di lezbianke the one with a roommate though we never used
the word

³⁵⁶ In *Davka*, the accompanying illustration comprises of a single woman’s photograph reproduced and distorted in multiple ways: one is pixelated, one is fuzzy and out of focus, another is made to look heat-scanned. The slightly different images of the same woman are labeled as different types: yente, kurve, yidene, and lezbianke (busybody, whore, Jewish woman, and lesbian)—suggesting the external imposition of these archetypal labels. These different female archetypes, which are the central “few words in the mother tongue” from Klepfisz’s poem present a rather eerie echo to the Forverts’s “Tipn fun yidishe froyen.” Irena Klepfisz, “Etlekhe Verter Oyf Mame Loshn/A Few Words in the Mother Tongue,” *Davka: A Jewish Cultural Revolution*, Winter 1997.

dos vaybl the wife
or the little woman³⁵⁷

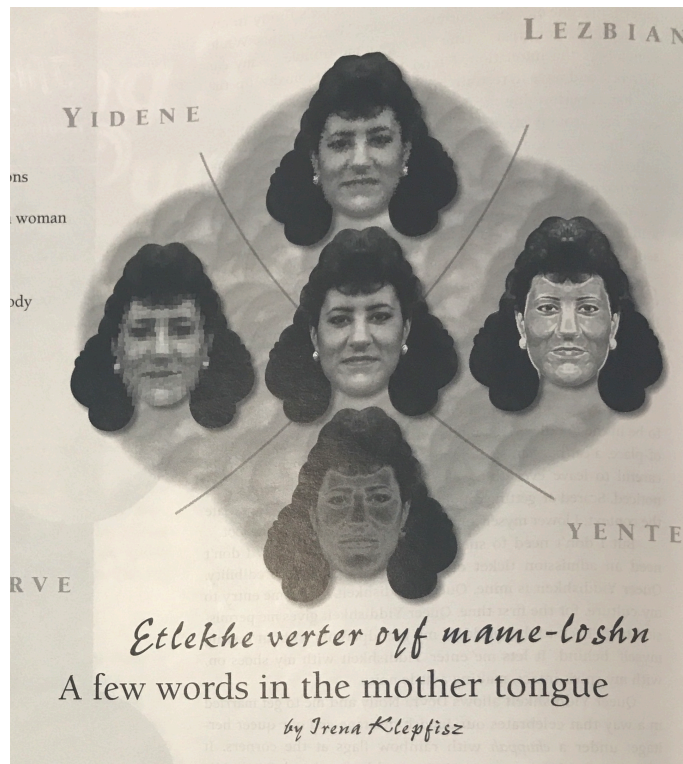


Figure 6 Graphic from *Davka* publication of Klepfisz's poem, 1997. (University of Michigan Library Special Collections)

In this publication, “*Etleche verter*” served as an exemplar of what the magazine was celebrating as Queer Yiddishkeit. Two neighboring essays in that issue coined the concept: one by journalist Alisa Solomon, titled “Notes on Klez/Kamp,” which scholars have attributed as the first use of the phrase; and another by performance artist Sara Felder, titled “Moving Toward the Punchline (Or, How I learned to Stop Worrying and Discovered Queer Yiddishkeit).” Felder’s piece also includes an English poem translated into Yiddish by Klepfisz. If this issue of *Davka* can be considered an inceptive moment for a movement known as Queer Yiddishkeit, then “*Etleche verter*” and Klepfisz’s bilingual poetry served as a linchpin within the movement.

³⁵⁷ Klepfisz, 38.



Figure 7 Cover of *Davka*, Winter 1997. (University of Michigan Library Special Collections)

Since that moment, Queer Yiddishkeit has come to describe a cluster of artistic production and a critical rubric, both of which draw a symbolic, political connection between queer culture and Yiddish culture. Queer Yiddish theorists ask how queer theory can illuminate the study of Yiddish language and culture, and Solomon, in the aforementioned article proclaims that “queer Yiddishkeit is Queer Theory in action.”³⁵⁸ Most significantly for this dissertation, Queer Yiddishkeit and Queer Yiddish critique borrow from queer theory the mandate to reject biology (biological reproduction in particular), and to seek alternative, specifically *non-*

³⁵⁸ Alisa Solomon, “Notes on Klez/Kamp,” *Davka: A Jewish Cultural Revolution*, Winter 1997, 28.

biological models of inheritance and cultural reproduction for Yiddish language and culture.³⁵⁹

Accordingly, Queer Yiddish critique is full of calls to eschew the biological. For example, Yiddish scholar, Jeffrey Shandler argues that Queer Yiddishkeit challenges the “biological model of intergenerational cultural transmission.”³⁶⁰ Cultural reproduction “without DNA” is precisely how Jonathan Freedman has described Queer Diasporism (his preferred term, which he understands as analogous to Queer Yiddishkeit).³⁶¹ For Freedman, this model of reproduction is both “anti-normative” and “anti-genetic.”³⁶²

I do not approach the critical project of Queer Yiddishkeit itself with particular skepticism, but considering the critical field, I find it necessary to ask what is meant by *biological* or *genetic* (or *anti-genetic*, for that matter). From context, it can be gathered that in instances such as these, the term “biological” often serves as a metonym for heteronormativity, conservatism, or overly linear conceptions of history and temporality—things well worth contesting.³⁶³ However, as this chapter will argue, a number of prominent works of Queer Yiddish (including the above poem by Klepfisz) demonstrate the unique possibilities of the biological imagination in the very project of challenging linear conceptions of Yiddish and Jewish culture. I see this examination of the meaning of “biology” for Queer Yiddish as aligned with the critical project, and even sharpening its own definition. I not only remove “biology” or

³⁵⁹ Jeffrey Shandler, “Queer Yiddishkeit: Practice and Theory,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 25, no. 1 (September 20, 2006): 110, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sho.2006.0140>.

³⁶⁰ Jeffrey Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language & Culture*, 263 p. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 189, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

³⁶¹ Freedman, *Klezmer America*, 91.

³⁶² Freedman, 93.

³⁶³ Weiman-Kelman, *Queer Expectations*, xxiv.

“biological” from the category against which Queer Yiddishkeit defines itself, I propose that we understand the biological imagination as integral to Queer Yiddish writing and thought.

Biology—as I discuss it in this dissertation—is a form of knowledge, which has been used in Jewish American cultural and literary production in order to highlight the possibility of a material, organic embodiment of Jewish inheritance or Jewish history. In the preceding chapters, “biology” sometimes refers to evolutionary theory, sometimes to race or typology. That is to say, it encompasses far more than processes of sexual reproduction. This more copious understanding of biology helps us see that biology itself is not necessarily Queer Yiddishkeit’s diametric, categorical opposite. By using “biological” as a placeholder for heteronormative reproduction, we lose out on the (sometimes complex, sometimes uneasy) artistic and intellectual affordances of the biological imagination in Queer Yiddish works. In particular, there are two biological concepts often at play in Queer Yiddishkeit. The first is the notion of Yiddish’s “extinction,” which links the language and its “survival” to the organic bodies of its “native speakers.” The second is the notion of Yiddish as an “inheritance,” which can be transmitted through the body, even for those who do not speak or know the language. While these two ideas might appear at cross purposes, they feed into one another. This chapter traces the interplay of desires for Yiddish and its survival, through the conflicting uses of these two ways of imagining the biological transmission of the language.

Queer Yiddishkeit’s prominent (though certainly not exclusive) investment in the question of transmission makes it an especially rich site for considering the biological imagination in contemporary Jewish culture. I wish to explicitly draw out what is for Queer Yiddishkeit an implicit understanding: biological thinking and biologically informed notions of Jewish cultural transmissions are active in post-45 Jewish culture, specifically through a not-

often articulated idea of Yiddish as biologically heritable. Queer Yiddish critics have begun to identify for us a conception of linguistic and cultural transmission, which I term here “Heritable Yiddish.” The concept of Heritable Yiddish expresses a desire for Yiddish’s continuation in the face of its ostensible (or ostensibly imminent) “extinction.” While the concept of a biologically heritable Yiddish has been forcefully excoriated by Queer Yiddish critics, Queer Yiddish art also often proposes that Yiddish can be carried in the body or can serve as an embodied form of knowledge. This chapter, in addition to proposing that we can read Queer Yiddish works—such as the poetry of Irena Kelpfisz—as expressions of the biological imagination, will provide a genealogy of the concept of a “Heritable Yiddish.” In naming this concept, I aim to articulate possibilities that have always been implicit in Queer Yiddish critique. I also propose that this is an occasion in which the field’s relationship to Heritable Yiddish, and the biological imagination, ought to be re-considered.

Queer Yiddish: Defining a Field

Queer Yiddishkeit exists in both artistic and critical iterations, with significant connections and divergences between the two. In the 1997 essay, “Notes on Klez/Kamp,” Alisa Solomon used the term Queer Yiddishkeit in order to name the preponderance of queer involvement in secular Yiddish institutions and spaces. Solomon records what a friend told her about an annual Yiddish cultural retreat: “You shoulda been there!...It was crawling with queers!...It was always a bunch of [*alte*] *kakers* and a bunch of queers, all singing, talking, dancing, partying together. It was fabulous.”³⁶⁴ It matters less whether the claim of queer “over-representation” in the Yiddish world is accurate, than it does that for Solomon and her cohort of

³⁶⁴ Solomon, “Notes on Klez/Kamp,” 28.

queer Jews, Yiddish cultural spaces provided space for queer visibility in the Jewish world. Put another way, Yiddish culture offered an avenue to be both Jewish and queer, without any felt contradiction. As queer Jews have become involved in Klezmer revival bands, theater, literature, and performance art, they have incorporated queer and Yiddish sensibilities into their artwork, drawing a symbolic, political connection between queer culture and Yiddish culture. Significantly, within Queer Yiddishkeit, Yiddish functions largely as just that: a sensibility.

Yiddish functioning as a sensibility (rather than, say, as a language of expression) in Queer Yiddishkeit (or as Solomon calls it, “Jewish Camp”³⁶⁵) falls into a broader post-World War II phenomenon, described as “postvernacular” Yiddish.³⁶⁶ According to Shandler, the postwar period witnessed a simultaneous decline of the Yiddish language as a vernacular, and proliferation of ways that people encounter and use the language. Just as the use of Yiddish’s primary semantic level (of communication and expression) has shrunk, the meta-level of its use has expanded. A single Yiddish phrase or word could be invested with a great deal of symbolism and affect, usually independent of that word’s primary semantic meaning.³⁶⁷ The language becomes a symbol and an aesthetic form in itself. Therefore, in the case of Queer Yiddish art, Shandler argues, Yiddish “becomes meaningful in Queer Yiddishkeit as a result of its provocative juxtaposition against queerness.”³⁶⁸ Through this symbolic juxtaposition, the minoritarian status of Yiddish becomes especially pronounced; in the words of Solomon,

³⁶⁵ Solomon, 29.

³⁶⁶ “Postvernacularity” was first coined by Cecile Kuznitz and is the key term through which Jeffrey Shandler describes the status of Yiddish in the latter half of the twentieth century. Cecile Kuznitz, “Yiddish Studies,” in *Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 549.

³⁶⁷ Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*, 3.

³⁶⁸ Shandler, 188.

“queer” and “Yiddish” take shape as “parallel systems of alterity” (a notably different image than that of intersecting or “interlocking identities,” often described in Queer of Color critique).³⁶⁹ As Naomi Seidman has pointed out, this foregrounding of minoritarian status, which “tends to privilege the transgressive or subversive aspects of culture-as-subculture,” dovetails with the general impetus of avant-garde or radical art, yet perhaps does not fully recognize that within Jewish culture, *Jewishness* was in its own way hegemonic and majoritarian.³⁷⁰ On the symbolic level, within the art of Queer Yiddishkeit, “queer” sometimes is a stand-in for alterity, and “Yiddishkeit” a stand-in for “Jewishness,” with or without the Yiddish language.

Theorizations of Queer Yiddishkeit often link the phenomenon to questions of genealogy, continuity, and futurity. And the stakes of these questions are often articulated through the language of “biology.” This is an idea promoted not only by academics, but also by artists such as Solomon, who writes that Yiddish feels to her like an avenue for queer Jews to contribute to “Jewish continuity,” and to reproduce non-biologically.³⁷¹ Whereas Solomon reflects the possibility that Yiddish culture could provide an alternative mode of reproduction for Queer

³⁶⁹ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 8.

³⁷⁰ Seidman, *The Marriage Plot*, 300 Despite such ideas of “parallel” or “analogous” forms of alterity, Seidman also points to how Jewish difference in Europe was indeed for a long time articulated as sexual difference, or sexual deviance. Often, to the European Christian gaze, the Jewish man was deemed insufficiently masculine and the Jewish woman insufficiently feminine. Such depictions often focused on the Jewish man, who was sometimes said to menstruate, and sometimes said to be a sexual predator; and, it doesn’t take a Freudian analyst to see that the European Christian obsession with Jewish circumcision was quite evidently laden with fear of castration. In such ways, Jewish difference has often been constructed through an articulation of sexual difference. Rather than parallel systems of alterity, in the Western imagination, Jewishness and queerness have in fact been co-constituted systems. Of course, in this historical context, a combined Jewish-sexual alterity was not a form of self-identification, but was rather the (sometimes fantastical) estimation of the majoritarian outsider, who deems the Jew different.

³⁷¹ Solomon writes, “Retrieving Yiddishkeit also allows us to participate in reproducing Jewish culture, a task queer Jews are often accused of neglecting as we don’t fall into heterosexual nuclear families as Jews have assimilated into America, that family structure has become the primary site of reproducing; but Queer Yiddishkeit insists that making Jewish babies is not the only way to sustain Jewish life. Rather, like artisans who restore faded frescoes, we contribute to Jewish continuity by revivifying—but also reshaping—a colorful legacy, all the while raising the question that institutional Judaism leaves off the table: not only how to keep Jews Jewish—but why.” Solomon, “Notes on Klez/Kamp,” 30.

Jews who wouldn't be engaged in sexual reproduction, Queer Yiddish scholars respond to another kind of impasse presented to the Yiddish language itself: the "death," or the "extinction," of Yiddish. Since the second half of the twentieth century, Yiddish is no longer the de facto language of, and marker of, Ashkenazi Jews; these scholars are responding to the way that Yiddish itself has its own "transmission" and "reproduction" problem. In the face of this supposed impasse, Queer Yiddish critique takes the same terms as Queer Yiddish art and reverses the order in its fundamental question. Queer Yiddish critique asks not, "How can Yiddish help queer Jews reproduce Jewishness?" It asks instead, "How can *queerness* or *queer theory* be useful in understanding Yiddish culture and its reproduction in the twentieth century?" In other words, if in Queer Yiddish art, *Yiddish* provides a solution to a "Queer-Jewish" impasse, in Queer Yiddish critique, *queer theory* provides a resolution to what might be called a "Jewish-Yiddish" impasse. If there had been a "heritable model," or a genealogical model of Yiddish reproduction, Queer Yiddish critics suggest, then perhaps queer theory can provide an alternative.

Thus, Queer Yiddish critique asks what elements of queer theory can be illuminating for Yiddish studies. Shandler writes that, "The most provocative implications for modern Yiddish culture posed by queer theory are the alternatives it proposes to a biological model of intergenerational cultural transmission."³⁷² Yiddish culture can look like queer culture in its unreliance on heterosexual reproduction and heteronormative family structures to sustain itself from generation to generation. Shandler builds off the work of Jack Halberstam, who theorizes queer time and queer intergenerationality through the study of queer subcultures.³⁷³ Shandler

³⁷² Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*, 89.

³⁷³ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Sexual Cultures viii, 213 p. (New York: New York University Press, 2005), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

takes inspiration from queer theory's example of a peer-cohort model of genealogy as a positive, energizing, and historically pervasive form of cultural production. He concludes, "Although Yiddish is often vaunted as a 'golden chain' forged by an unbroken succession of biological generations, it might be better understood in the modern era as proceeding through cohort generations, manifest in youth movements, political parties, trade unions, literary circles, educational institutions, various immigrant, refugee, and survivor associations, and so on."³⁷⁴ Shandler poses the question: What if the queer model of intergenerational continuity was already present in Yiddish culture?

If so, then queer theory can help us understand the last century and a half of Yiddish culture writ large. Shandler notes figures such as Yiddish linguist and YIVO founder, Max Weinreich, who only learned Yiddish later in life, and the canonical authors, S.Y. Abramovitch, I.L. Peretz, and Sholem Aleichem—known as *di klassiker*, or "the classics"—none of whom spoke Yiddish at home with their children. In some ways, the fabricated genealogy of *di klassiker* as the grandfather and grandson of Yiddish literature overcompensates for their individual lack of traditionally conceived "Yiddish continuity," even as it mythologizes and champions biological genealogy. (As Norich and Seidman have noted, the fact that Peretz and Sholem Aleichem were essentially peers further reveals the artifice of this structure.³⁷⁵) The discourse that modern Yiddish figures created around genealogy and intergenerationality do not necessarily reflect historical or cultural realities. By abstracting queer theory in order to see a "continuity of discontinuity" in modern Yiddish culture, Queer Yiddish critique therefore is

³⁷⁴ Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*, 190.

³⁷⁵ Anita Norich, "A Response from Anita Norich," *Prooftexts* 20, no. 1–2 (2000): 213–18; Seidman, *The Marriage Plot*.

more concerned with queer reproduction (meaning, alternative and anti-normative models of intergenerationality) than queer sexuality or gender per se.

Time and again, Queer Yiddish critique declares its project as seeking alternative, specifically *non-biological* models of inheritance and cultural reproduction for Yiddish language and culture.³⁷⁶ The imperative to imagine alternate modes of kinship and (re)production builds on the work of queer theorists such as Halberstam and Lee Edelman, both of whom also define the sought-after alternative *against* the biological. There is good reason for this: As Edelman has most famously articulated, the hegemonic imperative to procreate, to value the symbolic “Child” above all else, has been and remains grounds for oppressing, excluding, and denying the rights of queer people (or, to put it concisely, “Fuck Orphan Annie”).³⁷⁷ Edelman rebukes the practice of investing more in the future than in the present, while at the same time exclusively imagining a future that is merely a version of the present. Halberstam as well seeks to assuage the challenge of queer time and re-generation, calling for “intergenerational dialogue without mandatory continuity.”³⁷⁸ Accordingly, Halberstam’s project seeks a way of organizing time, not around biological reproduction or “reproductive time,” known to some as “the biological clock.”³⁷⁹ For these theorists, the problem is that intergenerationality must come with continuity—that futurity must mean sameness. And such theorization has shaped the figure of “biology” in Queer Yiddish critique: mandatory, conservative, heterosexual, reproductive.

³⁷⁶ Shandler, “Queer Yiddishkeit,” 110.

³⁷⁷ Edelman writes, “Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we’re collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from Les Mis; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital ls and small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop.” Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 29.

³⁷⁸ Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 185.

³⁷⁹ Halberstam, 5.

This is evident in Freedman's formulation of Queer Diasporism, a term he uses to theorize a radical form of Jewish culture more broadly, and which he considers analogous to the theorization of Queer Yiddishkeit.³⁸⁰ Freedman uses the term "queer" to describe a particular relationship to roots.³⁸¹ Queer Diasporism is a sort of diasporism that does require a return to roots, or a return to a center.³⁸² In the disavowal of the organic imagery of "roots," Freedman turns to the disavowal of biological reproduction, writing,

"In the countervision that lies at the heart of the radical Jewish cultural project stands a vision of culture as a nongenetic, non-normative form of genesis, making itself by shaping prior and contemporary cultural forms into new patterns of mixing and matching—a recombinant form of reproduction mysteriously undertaken without any DNA."³⁸³

Exhibited here, Queer Diasporism is a model of cultural production, defined as a "countervision" against the biological. This sense of radical Jewish culture aligns the genetic with the normative. Biological reproduction is figured once again as conservation, re-producing what is and that which already has been. In this respect, a rejection of biology is a rejection of stasis or return. Carving out an alternative to a biological model is to seek a model that can account for change.

³⁸⁰ Queer diasporism gains its name from the concept of "queer diaspora," which has circulated in American ethnic studies since the early 2000s. Like Queer Yiddishkeit, it has been defined against the biological. Queer diaspora, as delineated by David Eng constitutes, "reconceptualizing diaspora not in conventional terms of ethnic dispersion, filiation, and biological traceability, but rather in terms of queerness, affiliation, and social contingency," with the goal of "reorganizing national and transnational communities based not on origin, filiation, and genetics, but on destination, affiliation, and the assumption of a common set of social practices or political commitments." A queer diaspora is made through affiliation not filiation, social contingency not biological traceability, and political commitments not genetics. The queerness of this diaspora arises through connection, community, and kinship forged through consent rather than descent. And this eschewed descent is figured as biology and genetics. David L. Eng, "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas," *Social Text* 21, no. 3 76 (September 1, 2003): 5, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-21-3_76-1.

³⁸¹ Freedman, *Klezmer America*, 80.

³⁸² Freedman here adds to an extant discourse on Jewish diaspora. See for instance, Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (July 1993): 693–725, <https://doi.org/10.1086/448694>.

³⁸³ Freedman, *Klezmer America*, 91.

At stake for Queer Yiddish critique is not biology writ large, but particularly the championing of *biological reproduction* to the exclusion of all other forms of cultural transmission or relation. Queer Yiddish critics invite us to see beyond the model of Yiddish culture that insists on parent-to-child transmission. This insistence is only one part of a wider and more varied pattern toward which queer Yiddish critics—in fact, which most Yiddish critics—are *theoretically* (and rightfully) skeptical. Yet this phenomenon, Heritable Yiddish, also pervades Queer Yiddishkeit.

A Few Words on Biological Imagination in Queer Yiddish Art

The poetry of Irena Klepfisz exemplifies Queer Yiddish art: It engages thematically with queerness and is composed bilingually, in Yiddish and English. Her work also happens to touch upon the very issues that Queer Yiddish critique theorizes: It is interested in heritage, language, and biology. Klepfisz's poetry and essays activate Heritable Yiddish discourse, especially when her writing emphasizes an organic and biological relationship to language. Moreover, in Klepfisz's poetry, biological themes stand as a way to negotiate questions of bodily inheritance, queerness, and the relation to Yiddish language and culture of the same. Acknowledging and exploring this can both enrich the interpretation of her work and aid in negotiating the relationship between Heritable Yiddish and Queer Yiddish.

Klepfisz's essayistic writing about her poetry makes it clear that she is invested in the organic basis of—and organic connection to—poetry and language. She has written that she includes Yiddish in her poetry so long as, “The Yiddish was an *organic* part of the emotions that drove the poem.”³⁸⁴ Writing in bilingual Yiddish-English is for Klepfisz an experiment, a

³⁸⁴ Irena Klepfisz, “Yiddish: It’s Complicated,” in *Languages of Modern Jewish Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Joshua L. Miller and Anita Norich (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 397.

striving, and an aim for “organic fusion.”³⁸⁵ Klepfisz describes her process of writing in nearly Romantic terms, stating that her poems begin “in the body” rather than “as an idea.”³⁸⁶ In this schema, “ideas” and cognition are separate from the bodily and the organic. Her Yiddish-English poems originate organically, through feeling in the body. Klepfisz thus distinguishes between knowledge that is known, and knowledge that exists outside of cognition, felt elsewhere in the self.

As much as Klepfisz’s experiment is present- and future-oriented, she also writes that it is a way to access the past, or a “cultural *yesrushe*/legacy.”³⁸⁷ Klepfisz distinctly translates “*yerushe*” in her essay as “legacy,” choosing this meaning of “*yerushe*” over other uses of the word, including inheritance (often material or financial). According to Klepfisz, “The act of writing partly in Yiddish also allowed me to place myself somewhat closer to my Yiddish literary ancestors.”³⁸⁸ The poet’s understanding of her own project is that writing in Yiddish is a way to establish a literary lineage, reaching backwards. Her intentionally forged connection to the literary *yerushe* is a constructed form kinship, with echoes to the queer concept of the chosen family. As Zohar Weiman-Kelman has written of Klepfisz’s bilingual work, “Using Yiddish is a political—not a naturalized—means of cultural transmission.”³⁸⁹ At the same time, this chosen kinship is accessed through Yiddish words which are figured as an organic, bodily resource. In this intentional, queer, literary kinship, Yiddish is simultaneously a choice and an inheritance, an

³⁸⁵ Klepfisz, 401.

³⁸⁶ Klepfisz, 400.

³⁸⁷ Klepfisz, “The Pen of the Heart,” 323

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 327

³⁸⁹ Weiman-Kelman, *Queer Expectations*, 107.

agential expression and an awakening of what is otherwise latent in the body. This is an organic inheritance, even though it is not necessarily the result of direct parental lineage.

In the collection of bilingual poems, “*Etleche Verter Oyf Mame Loshn/A Few Words in the Mother Tongue*,” Klepfisz’s poetry employs the concept of Heritable Yiddish as well.³⁹⁰ The collection’s title frames Yiddish (which, for most of her readers, is an unknown language) as a “mother tongue.” The titular moment of self-translation simultaneously thrones and dethrones Yiddish as “mother tongue.” The term, “mother tongue,” generally means the first language that a person learns, presumably from a mother, and the concept has a long history of connecting national identity to the organic body. However, in the Yiddish language, and in this poem, “*mame loshn*” refers specifically to Yiddish, rather than to the general concept. The title therefore causes a bit of dissonance: the Yiddish phrase suggests that Yiddish is the mother tongue, yet the phrase’s immediate translation out of Yiddish ironically reminds readers of Klepfisz’s poetry that Yiddish is *not* their mother tongue (why would I need someone to translate from my mother tongue so that I may understand it?). The self-translated title tells readers that Yiddish is both their mother tongue *and* a language that they do not yet know.

The idea of “not yet” known knowledge is crucial to this poetic project, because Klepfisz’s bilingual poems have a teaching form and function. Throughout the cycle of bilingual poems, each Yiddish word is glossed and reiterated; the macaronic poetics performs didactic, rhythmic repetition, mimicking a vocabulary lesson or a dictionary. In the cycle, Yiddish might be the mother tongue, but it is a language that the readers still have to learn (through reading the poems). Klepfisz’s minimalist poetry juxtaposes the ultimate connection to language asserted in

³⁹⁰ This collection of poems was named after Klepfisz’s first bilingual poem of the same name. They are published in a book of new and collected poems, also titled *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue*. Irena Klepfisz, *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue: Poems Selected and New (1971-1990)* (Eighth Mountain Press, 1990).

the label “mother tongue” with an implied paucity of knowledge of said language. With the status of *mame loshn*, Yiddish may hold a certain prominence for readers, but that does not consist of a typical kind of knowledge. As such, the poems highlight a not-yet-tapped internal resource, connection, or knowledge of language. Such a conception of Yiddish as heritable yet latent uses biology as a model—whether the model is Mendel’s concept of a recessive trait, or Darwinian reversion, or the fictional Dr. Carnovsky’s pondered atavism.

The biological imagination is also at work in the way that “*Etleche verter*” engages and reverses the motif of Yiddish’s extinction. Seeing Yiddish as a dying or endangered language is not only a common trope: it is the dominant narrative of the language in popular Jewish culture. As Norich describes and challenges, a dominant narrative of Yiddish in the United States tells of its natural, unavoidable supplanting by English, or its “organic dilution.”³⁹¹ This story is not entirely unique to Yiddish, or to Jewish American culture. Whenever people refer to languages’ endangerment, extinction, and survival, they are applying biological concepts (developed for the study of populations and species) to the study of interactions between languages and their speakers. These figurations invite us to imagine languages engaged in a Malthusian struggle for existence.³⁹² Some of Klepfisz’s bilingual poems do indeed emphasize Yiddish as the language of ghosts and of extinction, while others explicitly work against the grain of this cultural narrative. Her Yiddish-and-English poetry consciously returns Yiddish into the contemporary sphere and reverses the supposed extinction through translation and through asserting the Yiddish language’s intimate, primary, biological status as “*mame loshn*.”

³⁹¹ Norich, *Discovering Exile*, 4.

³⁹² Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 4.

Some poems in the “*etlekhe verter*” cycle emphasize language loss as a bodily phenomenon. The poem, “*Di tsung/The Tongue*” presents Yiddish as a physical lack, or something that exists only awkwardly in the body:

Zi Shvaygt.

Di verter feln ir
she lacks the words
and all that she can force

is sound
unformed sound:

a
der klang the sound

o
dos vort the word

u
di tsung the tongue

o
dos loshn the language

e
di trern the tears.³⁹³

Like many of the poems the cycle, this poem uses a bilingual, self-translating, “diptych” structure, which mimics a glossary. Each of these sounds is represented by a roman-character vowel, which is an imperfect index for the Yiddish sounds. For instance, “*u*” corresponds to “*di tsung*,” which could also be pronounced “*di tsing*” (and elsewhere in the cycle of poems is

³⁹³ Klepfisz, *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue*, 223.

transcribed as such). Moreover, readers might not know exactly how to voice, how to embody each sound (long “a”? short “a”?). Each word that lies beneath the surface of the sounds, the “unformed sounds,” in the left column has to do with language. The words *tsung*, *loshn*, and *trern* (tongue, language/tongue, and tears) all have to do with the body (*loshn* comes from the *loshn koydesh* or Hebrew-Aramaic component of Yiddish, meaning “tongue” as well).

The subject of this poem, “she” struggles because residual bits of language, the knowledge of how to create and voice the words, remain in her body, even if she lacks the words that we see beneath the sounds, or beneath the surface. Readers might have the opposite problem though—they see the words, “*trern*,” “*shvaygt*,” “*loshn*,” but do not know how to translate them from page to body. As much as these bilingual poems have a learning function, this poem emphasizes the challenge that the body presents for learning or remembering a language. This poem acknowledges that the body matters, that the body might carry a linguistic memory or linguistic lack. These “unformed sounds,” and these words that might be unutterable for a reader at once propose and challenge the idea of language housed in the body.

More explicitly biological themes organize other poems in the cycle. The introductory poem enacts a creative form of evolution, framing the poems that follow with an expression of biological imagination. This poem, titled, “I Cannot Swim,” is composed entirely in English, which sets it apart from the mostly bilingual cycle. In “I Cannot Swim” we find a hopeful invocation of bodily change and evolution from the perspective of a young girl at sea with her parents, presumably because of a forced migration. She tries to assuage the confusion of being landless by leaping into the sea. Submerging herself into the sea reverses the typical evolutionary narrative in which life forms emerged from the sea to live on land; this foreshadows the

evolutionary-poetic reversal found in the English-Yiddish translations that follow. The speaker tells us:

And I said to my parents:
there are no more lands
and no more peoples. We are strange
creatures and must grow gills.³⁹⁴

And later the speaker continues,

I said to my parents: I will grow gills
and tried to leap out into the water.
But my father held my wrists his fingers
iron nails piercing my bones. And he said:
you cannot swim.³⁹⁵

The speaker's reason for wanting to jump into the water and grow gills, "We are strange/ creatures" echoes earlier lines in the stanza, "we looked like a family but/ we were all strangers."³⁹⁶ The repetition of "strangers" and "strange" evokes the biblical refrain that the Israelites were, "strangers in a strange land" (Ex. 2:22). This phrase also condenses the Jewish religious and cultural consciousness of being diasporic wanderers: outsiders who supposedly have no connection to any particular land. Enjambment in these lines allows for that meaning of "strange" (as in "stranger") to settle and presents that strangeness as an extension of the problem that "there are no more lands" in which to wander or make a home. The following line completes the image of a "strange creature" and fuses the image of the wandering Jew with the image of non-human creatures. Her image returns biological literalness to the oft-evoked concept of minority, postcolonial, or bilingual hybridity. What the speaker wants to become—one who

³⁹⁴ Klepfisz, 213.

³⁹⁵ Klepfisz, 214.

³⁹⁶ Klepfisz, 214.

breathes underwater through gills—is not just human, not just a fish, but is hybrid. The insistence, “I will grow gills” seeks a biological, evolutionary manifestation of her geographic and linguistic change.

The image of growing gills is also a powerful introduction to a cycle of poems about language and speaking. Not only is speech closely tied to breath, but Ashkenazi bilingualism (constituting Hebrew and Yiddish) has often been likened to “breathing through both nostrils.”³⁹⁷ This phrase conveys an ideology in favor of symbiosis between the languages, rather than inherent competition. The metaphor implies that it ought to be natural, immediate, and unthinking for multiple Jewish languages to coexist in Ashkenazi culture—even if the reality was not quite so peacefully balanced—and in the Jew’s body. However, in Klepfisz’s poem, gills allow for breath without the mouth or nose. A person who grows gills transfers the act of breathing to another part of the body. We might imagine the nose and mouth’s other functions (like forming language) being dispersed throughout the body as well. Later poems in the “*Etliche verter*” cycle emphasize the body’s—and particularly the mouth’s—role in creating, knowing, and learning a language, yet the idea of “growing gills” may symbolize an alternative way of carrying language in the body.

At the end of the poem, the speaker’s father prevents her from growing gills and swimming. Schematically, evolution and generational continuity are pitted against one other. This moment casts a slight shadow over the subsequent bilingual poems about the extinction or survival of Yiddish. It is the father here who violently prevents the speaker from the attempt at evolving: Patriarchal protection apparently saves the speaker from drowning, but it also prevents

³⁹⁷ Dan Miron, “Breathing Through Both Nostrils? Shalom Ya’akov Abramovitch Between Hebrew and Yiddish,” in *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford University Press, 2010).

her from imagining new ways of adapting. The poem closes with a sense of danger—images of splintered wood, sharp shouts from the shore—and with the speaker’s head pressed to her mother’s breast. For a second time, the parental protection created in the family unit is offered through the body’s grip, which is not necessarily sufficient or beneficial. Even though the imagined evolution does not take place (she does not jump into the water and grow gills), the hope for transformation remains. In this instance, the biological imagination is a means to see beyond, or to resist, the clutches of heteronormative kinship.

In these poems, Klepfisz writes imaginatively against the teleological notion of Yiddish’s decline or “extinction” over the course of generations. Simultaneously, the bilingual poetry presents Yiddish as atomized heritable material. The poems’ “few words in the mother tongue” stand for bits of knowledge that are embodied, rather than thought or known, even if they are not directly received from the parents. Whether imagining Yiddish as undergoing extinction or imagining the language as latent material that can re-emerge from dormancy, the poems often activate the Heritable Yiddish discourse, negotiated through biological imagination. And yet, what makes these poems so fascinating is that they enact Yiddish’s inheritance and reemergence specifically through Queer Yiddish avenues: through its “re-learning” outside of the heteronormative family structures, even within the poems themselves.

This is especially true in “*Etleche Verter Oyf Mame Loshn/A Few Words in the Mother Tongue*.” The poem positions instruction as a means to Yiddish’s survival and evolution, rather than suggesting that Yiddish is becoming diluted. Once the poem introduces readers to “a few words” of Yiddish, it becomes increasingly dominated by Yiddish words. It transitions from a bilingual, self-translating composition (much like the cycle’s other poems), into stanzas that are composed solely in Yiddish. The final stanzas combine words glossed earlier in the poem,

including “*kholmt*” ([s/he] dreams), “*di kartofl*” (potatoes), and “*di lange shvartse hor*” (long black hair):

a meydl kholmt
a kurve kholmt
a yidene kholmt
a yente kholmt
a lezbianke kholmt

a vaybl kholmt
di kartofl
di khale

yiddishkeit

zi kholmt
di hor
di lange shvartse hor

zi kholmt
zi kholmt
*zi kholmt*³⁹⁸

After the Yiddish words appear with their English definitions, the English language recedes into the background, as though Yiddish has won the Malthusian struggle for existence. The poem thereby reverses the cultural narrative of Yiddish’s extinction at the hands of English. It enacts this reversal through teaching and translation, so that by the end, readers can read or hear the “un-diluted” Yiddish.

Yiddish takes over the poem precisely in the repeated proclamation of women (a young woman, a whore, a Jewish woman, a busybody, a lesbian, a wife) dreaming. The payoff for learning the Yiddish words, then, is to be able to express women’s dreams, or the mere fact that women do dream. Yet the repeated invocation of dreaming highlights a particular ambiguity of

³⁹⁸ Klepfisz, *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue*, 227.

agency within the poem's final stanzas. To dream, as in to *imagine* or to *hope*, is to will for something to happen. To dream in one's sleep, though, is to have thoughts without will or intention, to produce images and words without any control over them. The dreams in these lines lack any prepositions—no dreaming “of” or “about.” There is no cause, effect, or relation presented between the women and the repeated nouns: the woman's long black hair (before her wedding), the Sabbath bread, and the potatoes are simply there. They appear like Freudian condensations of images, language, and signification, which the poem does not unpack for us. In my reading, the patchwork of incomplete phrases suggests that the women's dreams are sleeping dreams. This also creates a rather playful image: the women are “dreaming” in Yiddish, or “dreaming in Yiddish.” And a cultural cliché would tell us that to dream in Yiddish would mean fluency and knowledge of the language. Dreaming is essentially language that the body produces on its own, without the subject knowing or thinking it. The un-agential thoughts of a dream bear a close resemblance to the idea of Yiddish as an un-thinking, or embodied, organic knowledge. This returns us to the central tension of Yiddish-as-Mother-Tongue and Yiddish as mostly unknown to readers; Yiddish as an organic inheritance and Yiddish as a language chosen and learned. There is no clear resolution or synthesis between these forms of transmission or knowing, but the poem does not require resolution.

To read this poem through the biological lens of “extinction” illustrates just how abstract the notion of Yiddish as an “extinct,” “endangered,” or “dead” language really is. We could understand the extinction as tied to “Yiddish speakers,” and assert that by the end of the poem, Klepfisz has made all of her readers into “Yiddish speakers.” We also could understand that the extinction or survival of Yiddish has to do with the presence of the language itself; that perhaps each poem, each word is a living unit of its own. If this is the case, then at the end of the poem,

which is populated by Yiddish words alone, then it matters which words remain. Many of these words are upsetting and commonplace to anyone familiar with Yiddish—*dos vaybl, di yenta*—and seem to be unlikely candidates for heralding a grand victory or resurgence of Yiddish. But one, *lezbianke*, gains power as a new utterance. The gloss at the beginning of the poem describes the “*lezbianke*” as, “the one with/ the roommate though we never used/ the word.”³⁹⁹ Now, uttering the taboo, and restoring that which had been unspoken, becomes instrumental to the survival of Yiddish. “*Lezbianke*” is a lone word: an addition, a stretching of the language. Perhaps this poem performs its own form of cultural and linguistic production, if not reproduction.

To classify this poem’s conception of cultural transmission as an *alternative* to the biological, or even as *nonbiological* obfuscates what is actually at play in Klepfisz’s work. What I see instead is a creative imagining of linguistic transmission and survival, articulated through biological concepts like evolution and extinction, and through considering the body’s role in housing language. Like many works of self-translation, Klepfisz’s poems are an experiment, in which Queer Yiddish imagination incorporates the ostensibly cast-off biological thinking.

Heritable Yiddish: Just Relax

The phenomenon that I call Heritable Yiddish has become visible through Queer Yiddish scholars’ forceful denunciation of it. Heritable Yiddish can perhaps best be summed up in the phrase: “Yiddish speakers are made in the bedroom, not in the classroom.”⁴⁰⁰ This cheeky aphorism is meant to delegitimize academic Yiddish, meaning those who teach or study Yiddish in universities and secular institutions (where most Yiddish speakers who are not Orthodox Jews

³⁹⁹ Klepfisz, 225.

⁴⁰⁰ Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*, 60.

have come to learn or use Yiddish by the turn of the 21st century). As Shandler has noted, the “bedroom” model maps Yiddish cultural and linguistic continuity onto Jewish ethnoreligious continuity. And, I would add, it centers the body as the site of language transmission. The idea that Jewish ethnoracial continuity is key to ensuring the future of Yiddish culture is not quite the same as the cultural stasis and conservatism that Freedman refers to. The “bedroom” model does not invoke biological metaphors—“genes” or “DNA”—to refer to cultural production. It refers to the literal reproduction of a specific kind of person (called “Yiddish speakers”). It is true that what Shandler calls “the biological model of intergenerational cultural transmission” suggests a degree of cultural conservatism.⁴⁰¹ However, it is “biological” in a far more material way. It does not only model cultural transmission after a model of biological reproduction, it attaches cultural transmission to biological reproduction, to the creation of specific bodies.

A broad concept of a Heritable Yiddish did not surface ex nihilo in the 1980s and 90s. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Yiddish has at times been imagined as a piece of cultural material that is transmittable through biological inheritance, rather than through instruction, by both Yiddish speakers and non-Yiddish speakers alike. The most famous formulation might be Kafka’s introductory speech delivered before a recitation of Yiddish poetry, in which he told an audience of Prague Jews that he would speak, “about how much more Yiddish you understand than you think.”⁴⁰² While he mistakenly claims in this speech that Yiddish is only 400 years old and that it is impossible to write a Yiddish grammar, his main point is that German speakers should have an easy time understanding Yiddish. He also claims

⁴⁰¹ Shandler, 189.

⁴⁰² Franz Kafka, “An Introductory Talk on the Yiddish Language,” in *Reading Kafka: Prague, Politics, and the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Mark Anderson (Schocken Books, 1989), 263.

that beyond their knowledge of the German language, the Jews in the audience have a particular connection to Yiddish:

“You begin to come quite close to Yiddish if you bear in mind that apart from what you know there are active in yourselves forces and associations with forces that enable you to understand Yiddish intuitively...But if you relax, you suddenly find yourselves in the midst of Yiddish...But once Yiddish has taken hold of you and moved you—and Yiddish is everything, the words, the Chasidic melody, and the essential character of this Eastern European Jewish actor himself—you will have forgotten your former reserve. Then you will come to feel the true unity of Yiddish, and so strongly that it will frighten you, yet it will no longer be fear of Yiddish but of yourselves.”⁴⁰³

Kafka asserts Yiddish’s presence and activity in the Jewish individual, even for one who does not speak or know it (such as himself). Perhaps for this very reason, this quotation is often cited in studies of the author’s interest in Yiddish language and culture.⁴⁰⁴ According to Kafka, there are “forces” and “associations with forces,” which are “active within” the Jewish audience members. By relaxing, by not acting, the forces within them can act upon the individuals; when Yiddish is spoken around them, the forces within the people will make it possible to understand Yiddish intuitively. Significantly, these “forces and associations with forces” constitute an alternative kind of knowledge that is spatially removed—“apart from”—other kinds of knowledge that the individuals knowingly possess. If the end result is the realization that they are no longer afraid of Yiddish, but afraid of themselves, then in fact the true takeaway is that Yiddish was within them all along. By relaxing and listening, the Prague Jews will shift from seeing Yiddish as other, to seeing Yiddish as a force within their bodies.

⁴⁰³ Kafka, 266.

⁴⁰⁴ See for instance Dan Miron, “Contiguity: Franz Kafka’s Standing Within the Modern Jewish Literary Complex,” in *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, n.d.), 303–50.

Kafka's exclamation has been reproduced sometimes as, "Jews of Prague, you know more Yiddish than you think!"⁴⁰⁵ In this version especially, Yiddish is presented as a form of knowledge that is an unknown, or an "un-thought" known. For the mostly German-speaking Jews addressed, Yiddish is posited as latent knowledge that is outside of cognition. Kafka's statement is a manifestation of Heritable Yiddish in that it emphasizes an intuitive comprehension and innate capacity for Yiddish, which is the result of a historical experience or knowledge received from one's ancestors. These people have never learned Yiddish, yet Yiddish for them constitutes a kind of knowing that is "more than" what is thought or known. Yiddish is an internal resource that they can tap into—an ability as innate as breathing, of which they'd never been made aware, but with which they were all born.

Even though this formulation is fantastical, it is, amazingly, often taken at face value. Contemporary scholars have perpetuated Kafka's conception of unknown-known Yiddish in their writing on Yiddish and Kafka's literary production. With the surge in scholarly interest in Kafka as a Jewish writer, it has become common to view "Kafka's whole literary enterprise as a monument raised to the glory of Yiddish, the lost and forgotten language of Western Jews...", as Pascale Casanova has written, and to assert that his work is "entirely translated from a language that he could not write, Yiddish."⁴⁰⁶ This sort of claim has been most prominently promulgated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who argue that Kafka's writings in German are able to de-territorialize and "Yiddish-ify" the German language.⁴⁰⁷ These sorts of statements do not provide

⁴⁰⁵ Cynthia Ozick, "Envy, Or Yiddish in America," *Commentary*, November 1969, 37.

⁴⁰⁶ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. Debevoise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 269.

⁴⁰⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

formal or practical explanation as to how Yiddish might possibly be present in Kafka's work.⁴⁰⁸

Deleuze and Guatarri rely on what they understand to be the symbolic power of Yiddish to challenge literary German. Such claims, much like Kafka's own claim about Prague Jews' unthinking knowledge, suggest Yiddish as powerfully present even in its strict absence. These scholars, too, perpetuate the notion that Yiddish is an invisible, latent form of knowledge that Ashkenazi Jews contain by merely being Jews.

Contrast Kafka's description of a Heritable Yiddish with a far more recent example, in which the biological figure of DNA allows an individual to imagine a similar form of transmission of Yiddish. In the spring of 2017, the podcast "The Longest Shortest Time" broadcast an episode in which the host and her guests discussed the challenge of passing knowledge of non-English languages to their children, especially languages that they do not know very well themselves, including Yiddish, Spanish, or Korean. Hillary Frank, the host, admits that she wants her daughter to know Yiddish, despite not speaking it herself, and says, "I don't know, maybe some of it's just getting diluted." To which her guest, Rebecca Lehrer responds:

Lehrer: "Yeah, I know. But maybe it's just, we absorbed it, and it's sort of like in our DNA now, and so your daughter—our daughters have to be that way."
Frank: "I, yeah, I'm gonna choose to believe that."
Lehrer: "Okay, me too."⁴⁰⁹

The notion that Yiddish might be "absorbed" and carried "in our DNA," is an appealing image in the midst of American Jews' perception that Yiddish is becoming extinct or, as Frank said, "diluted" over generations. It also fits into the popular narrative of Yiddish in the United States,

⁴⁰⁸ For a proper takedown, see Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

⁴⁰⁹ Frank, "When Mom Says Oy! And Dad Says ¡Ay!," 20:16-21:05.

which Norich describes skeptically as, “a story of assimilation and of inevitable, organic dilution.”⁴¹⁰

It is rather easy to conceptualize Yiddish as heritable in this way if one does not speak or hear Yiddish regularly. A person can imagine that Yiddish is a heritable ability if for them Yiddish does not exist as a real, full language, with grammar, vocabulary, and the capacity to express ideas from the most basic to the most complex (recall that Kafka himself stated that writing a grammar of Yiddish was impossible). In this regard, the conception of Yiddish as innate, bodily knowledge is symptomatic of Yiddish’s absence. Yet Yiddish speakers themselves might subscribe to such conceptions as well. Shandler’s study of “postvernacularity” includes an anecdote about a friend who wrangled her aunt into giving her a Yiddish lesson. This lesson consisted of no more than the aunt telling the woman, “Sit up straight...Open your mouth, relax your jaw...All right...The Yiddish should start coming out very easily now.”⁴¹¹

To make sense of these instructions, Shandler writes that for native Yiddish speakers who grew up in a generation surrounded by other native Yiddish speakers (and likely born before World War II), the idea that one could learn Yiddish later in life was preposterous. According to this reasoning, one does not merely pick up Yiddish as one might learn Italian or Mandarin as a student or while living abroad. I, too, do not read the aunt’s instructions as intentionally obstructive. There is something happening in her advice to relax the body, and merely let the language come out. Shandler points out, Yiddish is spoken of as a language that “*redt zikh*,” that speaks itself, or even in the words of a famous poem and song, “*yiddish redt zikh azoy sheyn*,”

⁴¹⁰ Norich, *Discovering Exile*, 4.

⁴¹¹ Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*, 59.

Yiddish is (/speaks itself) so beautiful(/ly).⁴¹² The aunt treats speaking Yiddish as though it were a breathing exercise: She tells her niece to sit up straight, relax her jaw, and that's all. In this way, the aunt's instructions for speaking Yiddish bear a striking resemblance to those that Kafka gave his audience for understanding Yiddish: both rely on relaxing the mind and body in order to activate something dormant within.

Norich once told me of something that she witnessed when she used to teach Yiddish to people who grew up hearing the language from grandparents but did not speak fluently themselves. She said that it seemed as though some students expected her to touch them above lip, and then they would have full knowledge of the language. The idea of teaching by touching above the lip comes from a midrash, which tells that all humans, before they are born, learn everything that is known in the world. Then, before they are born, an angel touches them above their lip, creating the groove of the philtrum, and thus erasing all that had been learned before life began. Whatever a person learns in their lifetime, then, is merely a re-learning, a re-claiming, of that innate, original knowledge. In the case of Norich's students, Yiddish was imagined as an internal resource that could be restored; something already inscribed on their bodies, and only erased on the surface of their lips; it was their grandparents' forgotten knowledge, which still resided in their bodies.⁴¹³

In combination with this folkloric idea of forgotten, embodied knowledge, culturally resonant biological conceptions of inheritance—particularly through the embodied text of DNA—very well seem to undergird such ideas about inherited, unknown knowledge in the

⁴¹² Shandler, 61.

⁴¹³ I was rather stunned when I myself heard similar sentiments expressed to me by a number of students and young scholars invested in Queer Yiddishkeit after I presented a paper about this very notion of “heritable Yiddish” at a conference.

contemporary period. The concept of an organic connection to language is a widespread phenomenon, which extends beyond the domain of Yiddish and precedes the genetic age. When the field of linguistics developed as a science in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, linguists viewed language almost entirely as history. For some nineteenth-century thinkers, “language” and “evolution” were nearly synonymous, or at the very least, went hand-in-hand. Today, the persisting modern concept of “mother tongue” arguably always binds an individual’s national, linguistic, and biological self into a seamless unity. This concept places a language as “property of a particular ethno-cultural group,” which, according to Yasemin Yildiz, means that it “can only be shared through biological inheritance, but not through appropriation.”⁴¹⁴

If, as Yildiz suggests, the modern concept of the mother tongue positions *all* languages as inheritance, then Heritable Yiddish can be extrapolated from a broader paradigm of normative, organic relations between ethno-racial or national groups and “their languages.” However, there is a key difference between the Mother Tongue paradigm, and the examples of Heritable Yiddish that I give here. Namely, in each of these examples of Heritable Yiddishkeit, the people who have ostensibly “inherited” Yiddish do not speak it. While Yildiz’s analysis of the monolingual paradigm as a “putative homology between native language and ethno-cultural identity,” is incredibly fruitful, I wish to expand on the organic relationship imaginatively forged between people and the “native” languages that they do not speak.⁴¹⁵

It is possible that the expectation of an innate, organic connection to the Yiddish language for legacy speakers might be baked into American academic Yiddish pedagogy. Consider the dedication to Uriel Weinreich’s famous 1949 Yiddish textbook, *College Yiddish*.

⁴¹⁴ Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 47.

⁴¹⁵ Yildiz, 34.

Weinreich writes that *College Yiddish* is, “*a matone di ale, vos bay zeyere kinder in moyl vet yidish lebn,*” “a gift to all those in whose children’s mouths Yiddish will live.”⁴¹⁶ It is difficult not to read this dedication through the lens of the significant demographic changes that have taken place in the seventy years since the writing of these words. By the end of the twentieth century, most Ashkenazi Jews in the United States did not speak Yiddish or live in Yiddish-speaking homes. However, in the immediate aftermath of World War II, this was not the case; nor did this outcome seem inevitable. The idea that more secular Yiddish speakers would come into contact with the language in the University than in the home (as happens today) would have seemed altogether foreign.

Weinreich’s textbook remains a staple of Yiddish instruction in American universities, where it is sometimes valued as a historical object as much as a language primer. The text itself serves as a cultural touchstone in the circle of academic Yiddishists, with ironically iconic lines such as, “*yidn redn yidish in ale lender*” (Jews speak Yiddish in every country).⁴¹⁷ The book’s composition and its author are iconic in themselves. Weinreich, born in 1926, composed the book in his early twenties; he earned a PhD from Columbia University and taught there until his death at the age of 40. He was the son of Max Weinreich, also a pioneer Yiddish linguist and one of the founders of YIVO, the Institute for Jewish Research in Vilna and then New York. Today, the summer Yiddish program at YIVO bears Uriel Weinreich’s name. His name and his work are emblems of academic Yiddish.

Nonetheless, Weinreich’s dedication illuminates the fact that academic Yiddish has not always been diametrically opposed to the heritable model of Yiddish. *College Yiddish* is not

⁴¹⁶ Uriel Weinreich, *College Yiddish* (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1949).

⁴¹⁷ Weinreich, 30.

dedicated to each student who picks up the book, but specifically to those who will have Yiddish-speaking children. It is also not dedicated to the Yiddish-speaking children themselves, but to the individual who contains the potentiality of these children. It suggests that Yiddish will live on, not in this book, but in the bodies of future children. This is, of course, a hopeful injunction, but the construction of Weinreich's wish elicits a sense of lack. The dedication suggests that the textbook alone, its students alone, and the college classroom alone are not enough to sustain the Yiddish language; yet it also suggests that their bodies are not sufficient to transmit Yiddish either. The textbook itself—and its explanation of itself in the dedication—positions *College Yiddish* as a prosthetic to the bodies that would ultimately carry the language. Through the bodily prosthetic, the classroom holds the promise of intergenerational reproduction. The messy reality is that the model of transmission of Yiddish attached to biological generations—the concept of Heritable Yiddish—has historically been imbricated with the academic or what Shandler calls the “youth cohort model” of Yiddish: The two can no more easily be extricated than they can be placed in diametric opposition: seeing them in opposition is rather specific to the contemporary moment.

“The Most Jewish Show on Television”

“Everyone understands Yiddish regardless of whether they speak it.”⁴¹⁸ These were not the words of Kafka, but of television writer Micah Fitzerman-Blue in a 2016 interview with the online Yiddish studies journal, *In Geveb*. Fitzerman-Blue was a writer on *Transparent*, the Amazon comedy series that follows a Los Angeles family in the aftermath of the former patriarch coming out as a transgender woman. In addition to being one of the most critically

⁴¹⁸ Diana Clarke and Saul Noam Zaritt, “Yiddish on Transparent: A Talk with Jill Soloway and Micah Fitzerman-Blue,” *In Geveb*, March 1, 2016, <https://www.ingeveb.org/blog/yiddish-on-transparent>.

acclaimed shows at the time to showcase narratives about queer and trans characters, it was popularly hailed, “The most Jewish show on television;”⁴¹⁹ “The most Jewish show on TV in a while;”⁴²⁰ “The Jewiest show ever;”⁴²¹ and “The most profoundly Jewish show in TV history.”⁴²² With episode titles like “Kina Hora,” and storylines exploring Jewish rituals, holidays, history, and culture, it is not a surprise that the series was received as such.⁴²³ *Transparent* might also be the most prominent example of Queer Yiddishkeit in the twenty-first century, especially if we hold onto the definitions of “queer” and “Yiddish” as particular, overlapping sensibilities.

This family comedy/drama follows the Pfefferman clan, made up of three adult children and two divorced parents. In season one, their parent Mort transitions to living as Maura. The show also follows the sexual explorations of the other family members. It is deeply engaged in questions of gender, sexuality, Jewishness, and family. In the second season, *heritability* also becomes a key point of exploration, as the episodes are sprinkled with flashbacks to an earlier generation of Pfeffermans in Weimar Berlin, where both their queerness and Jewishness are cause for precarity. All of these elements make the series a useful access point for thinking through heritability, queerness, and ultimately, Yiddish.

⁴¹⁹ Eric Thurm, “‘Transparent’ Is the Most Jewish Show on Television,” *Esquire*, October 6, 2016, <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a49295/judaism-on-transparent-jill-soloway/>.

⁴²⁰ Sara Ivry, “Transparent Is the Most Jewish TV Show in a While—and It’s Great,” *Tablet Magazine*, October 1, 2014, <http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/185735/transparent-is-the-most-jewish-tv-show-in-a-while%E2%80%94and-its-great>.

⁴²¹ Debra Nussbaum Cohen, “How Jill Soloway Created ‘Transparent’ — the Jewiest Show Ever,” *The Forward*, October 2014, <https://forward.com/culture/207407/how-jill-soloway-created-transparent-the-jewiest/>.

⁴²² Isaac Butler, “Transparent Is the Most Profoundly Jewish Show in TV History,” *Slate Magazine*, September 27, 2017, <https://slate.com/culture/2017/09/transparent-is-a-profoundly-jewish-tv-show.html>.

⁴²³ In 2018, allegations of onset abuse against the star, Jeffrey Tambor caused public opinion to grow ambivalent about the show. Many critics and activists questioned the dynamics inherent to casting a cis male actor to play a trans woman.

The show itself takes place in English, and its characters use a large dose of postvernacular Yiddish. In the interview in *In Geveb*, when Fitzerman-Blue proclaims that, “Everyone understands Yiddish regardless of whether they speak it,” the interviewers, Diana Clarke and Saul Noam Zarrit comment on this sentiment’s similarity to Kafka’s idea in an annotation to the interview. They write, “This echoes Franz Kafka’s words in the opening lines of his 1912 speech, ‘An Introductory Talk on the Yiddish Language:’ ‘I should like, ladies and gentlemen, just to say something about how much more Yiddish you understand than you think.’”⁴²⁴ The interview reveals that at one point in the production of the season, the scenes in Berlin were planned to be acted entirely in Yiddish and German, but the show runners chose to make the characters speak contemporary American English so that the actors could improvise, and so that the scenes of the past would seem more present, less in the past. With this, the *Transparent* writers present an ambivalent portrait of Yiddish as an unknown knowledge.

The idea of an inherited, unknown knowledge pervades Season 2 of the series. This family inheritance is not the Yiddish language, but trauma, specifically inherited trauma from the Holocaust. The season’s flashbacks show Maura’s mother, Rose, as an adolescent in the 1930s. Since the first season, there have been references to a Tante (aunt) Gitl, who died in the Holocaust. In the flashbacks, we learn that Gitl was transgender. By the end of the season, we watch as Gitl is targeted by the Nazis, not only for being Jewish, but also for her involvement in a queer and gender-non-conforming community at the Magnus Hirschfeld Institute for Sexual Research. In this respect, the series creates a narrative of the Pfefferman’s inherited trauma, in addition to the family’s inherited queerness.

⁴²⁴ Clarke and Zarrit, “Yiddish on *Transparent*: A Talk with Jill Soloway and Micah Fitzerman-Blue.”

As an intergenerational family saga, the narrative structure of *Transparent* often invites moments of seeing historical and familial patterns. For instance, Maura's coming-out is cause for daughters Sarah and Ali to re-visit their own sexualities and sexual identities, and the show presents this turn of events as matter of inheritance as well as inspiration. Moreover, the flashbacks to 1930s Berlin featuring Gitl provide a family history (perhaps too neat, too symmetrical) of queerness and trans identity. The juxtaposition of the two different time periods emphasizes that Maura's identity is not new, but a recycling and re-appearance of familial history. It is ironic that *Transparent*, a queer family drama, actually represents queerness itself fitting into a heteronormative rubric of intergenerational inheritance. While the show does celebrate alternative modes of kinship and chosen families, it for the most part adheres closely to the structure of a traditional family drama. Moreover, *Transparent* represents queerness, not as a mode of inheritance that is alternative to the biological, but as trait to be inherited biologically. In this sense, the show represents a rather conservative view of transmission, of kinship, and even of queerness. Both queerness and trauma seem to be biologically predetermined for the Pfeffermans.

Thus far, we have seen that the idea of a cultural inheritance figured biologically—imagining that one can inherit Yiddish *as though* it were a gene—tends to be metaphorical, or a self-conscious act of magical thinking. Inherited trauma, however, does not always remain a metaphor in the same way. There have been numerous scientific studies into the psychological effects of Holocaust trauma on the children of survivors. And in recent years, these studies have looked to epigenetics and the methylation (or, essentially, the expression) of certain genes associated with stress in order to pinpoint a biological basis of “second generation” (or even third

generation) trauma.⁴²⁵ Within the realm of this research, the passing down of knowledge, or of an experience, is no longer a mere cultural metaphor; it is regarded as a material phenomenon within scientific discourse. As we will see shortly, the series engages with this very scientific discourse. It is not clear to me—nor is it within my academic wheelhouse to explain—whether or not this biological research holds water. Nevertheless, this scientific framing of inherited trauma comes to structure the narrative of *Transparent*.

The series casts parallels between the present-day Pfeffermans in Los Angeles and the Pfeffermans in Berlin. The show also uses biological knowledge about inheritance in order to create a narrative linkage between the two storylines. In one scene in an episode called “Cherry Blossoms,” Maura’s daughter Ali invokes biological knowledge directly. In this sequence, Ali is seeking a research topic for her application to a gender studies graduate program, and she takes her best friend and sometimes lover, Syd to the Malibu public library. As they walk in, Syd asks Ali about where her family lived in Europe. The sequence then cuts to Ali reading a book, standing in the library stacks. Supple, extradiagetic, piano music carries over as the scene cuts from Ali in the library to a flashback in Berlin in 1933. In this flashback scene, we see Rose visiting Gitl at Magnus Hirschfeld’s Institute. Rose is there to ask for money for passage to America. The sequence then cuts back to Ali in present day, as she looks up from her reading to tell Syd about research that suggests that individuals can inherit trauma experienced by their ancestors:

Ali: “Oh my god, this shit is fascinating. Did you know there is such a thing as inherited trauma in your actual DNA?”

Syd: “No, I did not”

⁴²⁵ Natan P.F. Kellermann, “Epigenetic Transmission of Holocaust Trauma: Can Nightmares Be Inherited?,” *Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences* 50, no. 1 (2013): 33; Rachel Yehuda et al., “Holocaust Exposure Induced Intergenerational Effects on FKBP5 Methylation,” *Biological Psychiatry* 80, no. 5 (2015).

Ali: “They did this study on bunnies, where they give them electric shocks where they were smelling cherry blossoms, and the bunnies’ babies, and their babies, the grandbabies, they were all afraid of cherry blossoms.”⁴²⁶

After a few more questions from Syd, Ali explains, “It’s called epigenetics.” The story of Rose and Gitl in Berlin is framed by a scene of Ali seeking details about her family’s history.

Moreover, her reading is presented as the catalyst, leading to the intercut of the scene at the Institute for Sexual Research. And then, her explanation of inherited trauma and epigenetics invites the viewer to interpret the flashback scene of Rose and Gitl’s story—and all of the flashbacks to Berlin in the season—through the “epigenetic” lens. We, the viewers, are invited to consider: does this scene constitute inherited trauma? Is it encoded in Ali’s “actual DNA?”

The relationship between the main Los Angeles narrative and the flashback scenes is ambiguous throughout the season. The series made extensive use of flashbacks in the first season as well. These scenes showed the main cast in the 1990s, and the relationship between these flashbacks and the present-day drama is quite clear: The scenes delve into these characters’ pasts, which they all remember with varying detail. Yet the Berlin flashbacks narrate the lives of entirely different characters, whose stories the present-day Pfeffermans may or may not be familiar with. These are not as clearly the characters’ own memories. We do not know whether the present-day Pfeffermans have been told these stories; we cannot as easily create a narrative of how the characters in the present have been shaped by these scenes of the past.

This ambiguity is further complicated by one of the series’ most interesting formal elements: In all of the flashbacks to various historical moments—whether to 1930s Berlin, or 1990s Los Angeles—a handful of actors always appear, portraying various characters involved, in the manner of a theatre troupe. This means that the actor who plays the young Grandma Rose

⁴²⁶ Joey (Jill) Soloway, “Cherry Blossoms,” *Transparent* (Amazon, December 11, 2015).

is the same actor who had played the young Ali in the previous season's flashbacks. The identical appearance of the young Ali and the young Rose could represent the phenotypic resemblance between generations and the biological link between the grandmother and granddaughter. Such an interpretation would also suggest that the flashback scenes of Berlin are representations of actual events, and they are incorporated into the narrative in order to flesh out the family history. It is also possible to see the single actor's portrayal of two separate individuals as fantastical, suggesting that the scene is concocted in Ali's imagination. Perhaps what we are seeing is merely Ali's imaginative projection, placing herself into the family history, and placing her family at the center of Jewish and queer history in Weimar Berlin.

At tension between these two possible interpretations are: 1) the question of whether the scene constitutes reality or fantasy within the story-world of the show; and 2) the question of Ali's awareness of said scene. We might likely presume that either the scene is accurate and therefore unknown to Ali, or else it is a fabrication that she is consciously forming and considering. Yet what if the scene is not a fabrication of Ali's imagination, but still narratively conducted through her? Or, could the flashback be both imagined and true? As Marianne Hirsch has written about the distinction between memory and history, "Memory signals an affective link to the past, a sense precisely of an embodied 'living connection.'"⁴²⁷ If we consider Ali one such

⁴²⁷ The Holocaust and the transmission of memories from the Holocaust has become central in the burgeoning field of memory studies. Maura, born after World War II to a woman fleeing Nazi Germany fits into what has been called the "postmemory generation." Most critics who are invested in the idea of "postmemory" look to the narratives and life writing of the children of Holocaust survivors, seeing how they take on the narratives and traumas from the Holocaust as their own memories. These individuals are expected to serve as the "living connection" to the past. According to Marianne Hirsch, this is sometimes a contrived or cultivated position, as postmemorial work "strives to reactivate and reembody more distant social/national and archival/national memorial structures by investing them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression." Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (March 20, 2008): 111, <https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2007-019> This conception of memory that must be "reembodied" is predicated on the idea that memory itself is an embodied form of knowledge. Reembodiment in this case involves mediation—especially through the medium of photography, Hirsch argues. Postmemory, in the humanistic sense, then is not a matter of direct transmission, within the familial structure, and it is not a matter of tapping into what exists within the individual already. It is a matter of

embodied, living, affective link to the past, then perhaps cognition has nothing to do with memory in the scene. We, the viewers, could see the story from the past as intimately connected to Ali, or even embodied in Ali, even if she does not know or understand it. This would mean that the piece of family memory is still generated in and through Ali, at least on the level of narrative construction, without her cognition.

The humanistic concept of embodied memory, as theorized by Hirsch, is not the same as the scientific study of inherited trauma. While memory scholars often communicate mixed feelings regarding memory practices, we might still wonder at the attitudes (not necessarily “objective”) of scientific researchers’ who study inherited trauma. The notion that individuals can inherit trauma from their parents presents a fix for those studied: a biological predetermination of stress or worse. These findings coincide with Jewish communal investment in memory preservation and attempts to cultivate a “living connection” to the Holocaust. Whether these findings strike you as plausible or absurd, the *inquiry itself* seems to speak volumes about cultural desires and expectations. Embodiment, as Hirsch describes it, has to do with knowledge transmitted and received—whether learned, heard, or seen—sometimes with the aid of historical documents or photographs. Embodied knowledge, or memory, in this regard is specifically about awareness and cognition. We could say nearly the opposite about the biological understanding of inherited trauma or inherited memory, though: this sort of embodiment is outside of cognition. The “memory” represented in the library flashback would

adopting and embodying certain kinds of knowledge and experience, which otherwise might not have been. Nonetheless, the notion of reembodying does perhaps suggest a sense that these memories originated within the body and were always already there, but needed the help of prosthetic objects such as the photograph to be embodied once again.

therefore be better described by the biological paradigm of inheritance than by the cultural paradigm of memory.

I understand this biological quest into inherited trauma, or inherited history, as connected to the notion of the “unknown knowledge” of Yiddish. The library scene, in its adherence to the biological conception of “inherited memory” enacts a sort of biological magical realism. As Freedman has suggested about *Transparent*, “Historical experience is baked into the Pfeffermans without their knowing it, as a knowledge that they bear with them in every fiber of their being and which determines and indeed predetermines them.” He also distinguishes that for this onscreen family, “The memories of sadness, loss, and catastrophe that transcend the generations...are encoded narratively, in memory, as much as they are epigenetically.”⁴²⁸ Here, Freedman helps expand on the meaning of trauma in one’s “actual DNA.” I would add that both biological and cultural conceptions of “inherited trauma” inform this narrative, yet it is far more structured by the biological conception with its more tenuous awareness of the past. The dreamlike quality of some of the flashbacks in the season, and the effect of the cast of actors playing different roles throughout the series, reminds us that this work is not intended as realism, as a direct representation of life as it is lived. What we are seeing is indeed structured by biological imagination. By following a biological form in its narrative form, the series evades realism.

Moreover, it shouldn’t come as a shock that the actual findings of the research that Ali cites are more complicated and more measured than what she reports to Syd.⁴²⁹ However, what

⁴²⁸ Jonathan Freedman, “‘Transparent’: A Guide for the Perplexed,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, April 10, 2016.

⁴²⁹ It so happens that the researchers used rodents, not rabbits. Maya Barzilai pointed out to me that the history of linking Jews to rats was likely the writers’ reasoning for having Ali make the “mistake” of talking about bunnies instead of rats or mice.

matters less in this case is the accuracy with which *Transparent* relates biological findings, and what matters more is how characters use biological knowledge to create meaning in their lives and in the narrative as a whole. The series uses a biological idea as a model for the narrative structure. The popular understanding of DNA makes Ali's slight misconception—epigenetics is not really about what's written in one's "actual DNA"—both possible and compelling. The genetic code has, after all, been called "the book of life."⁴³⁰ In the popular imagination, many see the genome as an embodied text that is material, microscopic, and all-pervasive. We are able to imagine that in each cell, in each part of our body, exists a bit of our ancestors' stories. This embodied text is a particular kind of memory: it is a form of knowing that takes place in the body.

Transparent exemplifies a queer narrative framed by a biological idea of inherited, embodied knowledge. While this series is not about inherited language, its exploration of inherited, embodied knowledge exemplifies how biological imagination becomes an artistic mode of representing cultural inheritance. This is especially the case for knowledge that has for whatever reason not been transmitted through traditional means. The parallels between inherited memories and inherited Yiddish (as delineated earlier in this chapter) underline the extent to which notions of Heritable Yiddish play out as a form of biological imagination and are especially appealing in the genetic age.

I must note that I do not mean, by placing a work about inherited trauma—or, specifically, about inherited memories of the Holocaust—in conversation with the idea of a Heritable Yiddish, to equate Yiddish and the Holocaust. The near conflation of Yiddish and

⁴³⁰ Brigitte Nerlich, Robert Dingwall, and David D. Clarke, "The Book of Life: How the Completion of the Human Genome Project Was Revealed to the Public," *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine* 6, no. 4 (October 2002): 450, <https://doi.org/10.1177/136345930200600403>.

Jewishness is something we've already seen in this chapter—assigning a “knowledge” of Yiddish to any Ashkenazi Jew, viewing it as an innate resource, or a symbol of Jewishness, rather than an actual language one would in fact learn.⁴³¹ By another turn, Holocaust remembrance has become a significant facet of American Jewish culture (and religion). And to conflate Yiddish itself with the Holocaust is a rather common practice as well. Yiddish comes to stand for all that has been lost. In actuality, other historical forces—assimilation in the United States, Stalinism in the Soviet Union, the Hebrew language project in Israel—have also had a role in the decline of Yiddish in the twentieth century. However, when we discuss Yiddish and “the history of the twentieth century,” we are usually euphemistically referring to the Holocaust in particular.⁴³² Still, in the midst of all of these associative slippages, the comparison—without collapse—between the representations of embodied, inherited language and embodied, inherited trauma can be mutually illuminating.

Transparent, an avowedly queer and Jewish series, organizes itself around a form of embodied knowledge, such that the series aligns with a notion like, “Everyone understands Yiddish regardless of whether they speak it.” Whether focused on trauma, or queerness, or Yiddish itself, this series is created through an artistic impulse to imagine history as a gene that can be transmitted and housed in the body. As this chapter has shown, contemporary works of Queer Yiddish or Jewish art are neither immune nor antithetical to such imaginings, even if certain theorizations of Queer Yiddishkeit might suggest otherwise. Works of Queer Yiddish are an especially rich site to consider what biological thinking does in literary and artistic works,

⁴³¹ This is common in phrases like, “think Yiddish, dress British,” or “write Yiddish, cast British.” (Or, in the context of *Transparent*, Soloway stated in an interview she wanted instead to “write Yiddish, and cast Yiddish.” Clarke and Zaritt, “Yiddish on *Transparent*: A Talk with Jill Soloway and Micah Fitzerman-Blue.”)

⁴³² Anita Norich, *Writing in Tongues: Translating Yiddish in the Twentieth Century*, Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 10–11.

especially for poetic or narrative construction. By the same token, Queer Yiddish critique can help us refine what terms like “biological,” or “nonbiological,” are actually accomplishing for us in our critical enterprises, precisely because of the field’s avowed *disinterest* in biology. At the very least, we need to be open to a messier, more copious, more embodied, and less rational understanding of biology.

Chapter 6 Conclusion: “Stored in the Genetic Code:” Biological Imagination Today

In 2018, upon receiving genetic ancestry test results from the company MyHeritageDNA, customers were able to view a personalized animation to see them revealed. At the time, a friend who knew of my academic interests in Jewish genetics sent me the link to one such animation, produced for her grandmother. This is what I saw:

The screen is black, flecked with stars. Then words appear across the sky, “Barbara, ready to explore your ethnicity?”

After this prompt, the user presses the “Let’s go” button. You move quickly through the starry sky until earth appears, radiant and spinning. Music begins to play—in this case, cymbals crash and an energetic klezmer song rolls in (the music serves as a hint about the culture or ethnicity that the company has attributed to Barbara’s genetic ancestry makeup). Earth appears, drawn not as a blue and green mass, but as a globe with the national borders of a political map. The globe spins until Europe comes into view. A translucent fuchsia oval hovers over a large central and eastern swath of the continent. The screen reads, “Barbara, you are...” Numbers begin to rack up in the corner of the screen until they read, “100% Ashkenazi Jewish!”

The vantage from which this animation illustrates genetic ancestry is telling: the company invites their customers to gaze upon their genetic ancestry from space. While DNA resides hidden within our bodies’ cells, the company conveys that in order to envision the full meaning of an individual’s DNA, one need not look under the microscope, but instead must look at the entire globe. Personal genetic makeup is something of global significance. Or alternately, the animation suggests that when a person looks into their DNA, they can see a personalized map of

the world. One can see not only how they fit into the world, but how the world fits into them.

Through genetic ancestry tests, consumers biologically imagine their own bodies' geographies—both internal and external. In this way, companies like MyHeritageDNA and the personal biological information they produce, can contribute to a genetic conception of diaspora.

By the start of 2019, one report counted that at least 26 million people (not only in the United States) had purchased at-home genetic testing kits.⁴³³ This same report predicted that the number could grow to 100 million by the end of 2020. The widespread phenomenon of genetic ancestry testing contributes only the latest fold in a longer-standing discourse of Jewish genetics. The broader field of knowledge ranges from research into genetic diseases found at high rates in Jewish communities, to scientific inquiries into the origins of Ashkenazi Jews, to other forms of “genetic Jewish history.” As I have begun to show in previous published work, this personalization and commodification of genetic knowledge has significant implications for the ways that Jews and non-Jews conceive of Jewishness as biological in the twenty-first century.

At once metaphorically rich and scientifically authoritative, DNA serves as a conduit to articulate knowledge about a Jewish past, not abstractly, but as it lives in people's organic bodies. Jewish genetics signals how in the midst of crucial cultural, historical, and science-historical developments in the second half of the twentieth century, there have emerged new ways to view the Jewish body as biologically distinct. Indeed, there remains a great deal of interest (even literal “buy-in”) in a discourse of a bodily, heritable Jewishness. These emerging practices of narrative-formation and reconciliation between history and self through genetic knowledge must be understood within a longer historical and cultural context. Particularly, this

⁴³³ Antonio Regalado, “More than 26 Million People Have Taken an At-Home Ancestry Test,” *MIT Technology Review*, February 11, 2019, <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/610233/2017-was-the-year-consumer-dna-testing-blew-up/>.

cultural trend aided by the genetic revolution carries over many attitudes, practices, and forms of biological imagination from previous eras. In particular, genetic conceptions of Jewish inheritance are invested in temporality and history, much like earlier iterations of the biological imagination were.

While I have charted multiple phenomena that reflect a similar impulse throughout the dissertation, genetic ancestry tests constitute an especially material turn in the biological imagination: the companies run their tests on your saliva, containing sloughed-off cells from the inside of your cheek. These tests are not only personal, but fleshy. The history that emerges from the tests seems to be particularly intimate as well, as though you've been carrying it in your mouth all along, waiting to utter it. Establishing incredibly intimate connections between this body and others is precisely how genetic history, ancestry, and kinship make meaning. As Marilyn Strathern has suggested, in our understanding of the gene, "Knowledge and kinship become momentarily inseparable."⁴³⁴ And as Priscilla Wald has argued, genetics "claims to make new sense of human beings, populations, and relatedness itself."⁴³⁵ These "populations" in genetic science are almost always named for geographic regions. Accordingly, genetic ancestry knowledge amplifies the category of geography within our understandings of kinship and relatedness. In the case of Jewish genetic ancestry, this has meant new ways of conceptualizing diaspora.

This concluding chapter will suggest that the phenomenon of imagining and articulating Jewish diaspora through genetic knowledge has literary antecedents, which are themselves

⁴³⁴ Marilyn Strathern, *Kinship, Law and the Unexpected: Relatives Are Always a Surprise* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 74.

⁴³⁵ Priscilla Wald, "Future Perfect: Grammar, Genes and Geography," *New Literary History* 31, no. 4 (2000): 695, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2000.0051>.

significant expressions of the biological imagination. Indeed, literary works anticipate the sort of “genetic Jewish history” that would be written by scientists decades later. I’ll be looking at two works written before genetic technology allowed scientists to isolate specific genetic sequences that mark Jewish inheritance (and before companies like MyHeritageDNA could commodify them). In particular, genetics allows the poet Adrienne Rich to produce and contain a proliferation of historical trajectories, rather than a definitive genetic “map.” As a foil to Rich’s genetic diasporic optimism, I will also gesture towards the (ironic) biological diasporic pessimism of Philip Roth—which brings our attention to the interrelation of vertical transmission (inheritance) and horizontal transmission (contagion). Both works suggest that writing about a Jewish inheritance through biological metaphor can be a poetic act of affiliation—of (re)claiming, rather than naturalizing, a Jewish inheritance. And the comparison of the two will help begin to show the ethical indeterminacy of genetic conceptions of the self and history.

The Project Thus Far

This argument emerges from research I have conducted over the past several years into the contemporary discourse of Jewish genetics, which has analyzed both how this scientific knowledge is produced and how it is disseminated in the public sphere. In two recent papers, I found myself drawn to—yet unable to explore fully—the ways that Jewish genetic discourse might shore up, or complicate, other more established conceptions of Jewish diaspora. Jewish diaspora as a concept is often foundational to the writing of Jewish genetic history. It also determines the sort of information sought about Jews through genetics, whether studies seek out founders, or the “real origins” of Ashkenazi Jews, or proof that Jews around the world are connected historically and genetically to one another and to the Middle East.

For instance, in the information provided by genetic ancestry testing companies—who

market the idea of certainty around genetic origins—Ashkenazi Jewish genetic ancestry introduces ambiguity. On their website, the company 23andMe explains that, “Ashkenazi Jews settled in Central and Eastern Europe in the late Middle Ages,” without stating *from where* these Ashkenazi Jews arrived.⁴³⁶ The description continues, “Their modern descendants remain genetically more similar to other Jewish populations than to their European neighbors, reflecting shared western Asian origins.”⁴³⁷ Even within the company’s classification system, the category of Ashkenazi ancestry stands out for being peculiarly non-geographical. 23andMe sub-divides European ancestry into the categories of Eastern Europe, Northern Europe, Southern Europe, and Ashkenazi. Therefore, as I have argued elsewhere, “‘Ashkenazi’ is both *instead* of and *outside* of the geographic categorization. Through such a system, Ashkenazi ancestry receives heightened visibility as a seemingly major subcategory of European ancestry. Yet at the same time, it also becomes an outlier among European categories for its non-geographic nature, for its nowhere-ness.”⁴³⁸ Companies like 23andMe are always trying to trace back to roots, to origins, but they imply that the Ashkenazi origin itself is no origin but itself a secondary landing spot—an origin that is already a diaspora.

One other particularly striking reference to the concept of diaspora, articulated through genetic knowledge, comes from the book *Jacob’s Legacy: A Genetic View of Jewish History* (2008), a book written by geneticist David B. Goldstein, aimed at a public (non-scientist) audience. This book is filled with not only scientific findings, but also stories of discovery and

⁴³⁶ “23andMe Reference Populations & Regions,” 23andMe Customer Care, accessed December 25, 2018, <http://customercare.23andme.com/hc/en-us/articles/212169298-Reference-Populations>.

⁴³⁷ This detail is somewhat complicated by the fact that 23andMe does not identify unique ancestry categories for any other Jewish populations beside Ashkenazi.

⁴³⁸ Dory Fox, “Jewish Genetic Potency: The Meaning of Jewish Ancestry in the 21st-Century United States,” *American Jewish History* 104, no. 1 (2020): 71, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ajh.2020.0014>.

the emotions that these discoveries created for Goldstein. In a prefatory anecdote, he writes about a rock concert that he attended in the Roman amphitheater in Caesarea, Israel, “I often think back to that concert and those kids taking off their shirts and swirling them around, those Cohen Y chromosomes and varied mitochondria that may have started there and somehow found their way back after two millennia.”⁴³⁹ Goldstein imagines these shirtless concert goers stripped down to the molecular level, revealing biological, material remnants of Jewish history. These Cohen alleles and mitochondrial DNA are, for Goldstein, solid links between the dancing, youthful bodies and the land that they dance upon. Biology allows him to see this return as “simultaneously concrete and miraculous,” and somehow beyond the realm of geopolitics.⁴⁴⁰ He sees their genetic material as both the record of and the mandate for the ingathering of the exiles. In other words, Goldstein uses genetic knowledge to explain what he sees as the end of Jewish diaspora.⁴⁴¹ This transcendent miracle of return is, for Goldstein, material rather than metaphorical.

Theories and Practices of Diaspora

The questions that genetic ancestry introduces—about connections between bodies across time and space—dovetail with a broader critical understanding of diaspora. These questions might be understood, as Adrienne Rich writes in *Sources*,

“*With whom do you believe your lot is cast?
From where does your strength come?
I think somehow, somewhere
every poem of mine must repeat those questions*”

⁴³⁹ David B. Goldstein, *Jacob's Legacy: A Genetic View of Jewish History* (Yale University Press, 2008), xiii.

⁴⁴⁰ Dory Fox, “‘We Are in the First Temple’: Fact and Affect in American Jews’ Emergent Genetic Narrative,” *Shofar* 36, no. 1 (2018): 74–107, <https://doi.org/10.5703/shofar.36.1.0074>.

⁴⁴¹ Nadia Abu El-Haj, *The Genealogical Science: The Search for Jewish Origins and the Politics of Epistemology* (University of Chicago Press, 2012).

Which are not the same. There is a *whom*, a *where*
that is not chosen that is given and sometimes falsely given”⁴⁴²

Diaspora as a concept allows us to think through questions of *whom* and *where*, and whether these are bound together or separable, whether they are given or chosen.

The term diaspora has most notably entered the current critical lexicon through the work of postcolonial and critical race scholars. Paul Gilroy has used the word to describe relationships across the Black Atlantic, which he theorizes has combined “structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering.”⁴⁴³ Diaspora connects a heterogeneous network of people, separated geographically, or temporally. Diaspora is a way to organize the connection between bodies, texts, and ideas across time and space. Theorized as such, diaspora permits, and even maintains, difference between individuals and cultures, and does not call for a return to an originary center. Diaspora’s initial meaning was the dispersal or displacement of a people from their point of origin; and implicit in this concept is an always-impending return to the “origin” or an ingathering at a “center.” Indeed, many theorists work over and against the structures of a “center” and “periphery,” such as Stuart Hall, who has proposed the term “diaspora” as a way to understand cultural identity that is predicated on difference, not return.⁴⁴⁴

Within the study of Jewish literature and culture, diaspora is crucial as both a structure and a motif.⁴⁴⁵ As George Steiner argues, diaspora can be understood as the precondition for Jewish creativity, not only in the modern period, but also for millennia prior. Contemporary

⁴⁴² Rich, *Sources*, 12.

⁴⁴³ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 3.

⁴⁴⁴ Hall, qtd. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 12.

⁴⁴⁵ This was especially true as “exile” became not only a metaphor for alienation, but a condition of life for Yiddish authors in the twentieth century, as Norich argues. Norich, *Discovering Exile*.

scholars such as Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi and Maeera Schreiber echo this claim, regarding Jewish poetry in particular. The term can mark the “transnational cultural production” of modern Jewish literature (a phenomenon that Allison Schachter has traced within interwar Jewish modernism, and which she frames partially as an analog to the Black Atlantic).⁴⁴⁶ Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin have theorized Jewish diaspora as a cultural power, distinct from state’s coercive power.⁴⁴⁷ Diaspora, for Boyarin and Boyarin, is more chaotically rhizomatic than statically “rooted.” Specifically, they argue, diaspora challenges linear, secular historiography of progress, and allows for alternative modes of identification besides the state (for Jews, and for anyone).

It is no coincidence that Hall’s insistence on diaspora without a compulsory return attempts to sever the term from Zionist associations. Both outside of and within Jewish studies, Zionism, the state of Israel, and the condition of world Jewry since Israel’s establishment, exerts tremendous pressure on the theorization of and critical engagement with the term, “diaspora.” While some might view the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 as the end of Jewish diaspora, it would be more appropriate to note that this national political consolidation is by no means an end, but rather a particular historical fold in the history of Jewish diaspora. It is due to the contrast—the oft-rehearsed Israel-diaspora binary—that rigorous and creative concepts of diaspora have become ever more critical to Jewish studies scholarship in the second half of the twentieth century.

When it comes to theorizing diaspora, genetics can be understood as either a conduit or a

⁴⁴⁶ Allison Schachter, *Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17.

⁴⁴⁷ Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), vii.

hinderance. As Priscila Wald points out, population geneticists “use maps of genetic traits to chronicle the movements and migrations of human populations: *The Great Human Diasporas*, as the title of a book by a prominent population geneticist proclaims.”⁴⁴⁸ This is perhaps a “conventional” notion of genetic diaspora. By contrast, scholars like David Eng advocate for “reconceptualizing diaspora not in conventional terms of ethnic dispersion, filiation, and biological traceability, but rather in terms of queerness, affiliation, and social contingency,” with the goal of “reorganizing national and transnational communities based not on origin, filiation, and genetics, but on destination, affiliation, and the assumption of a common set of social practices or political commitments.”⁴⁴⁹ This Queer Diaspora, according to Eng, is made through affiliation not filiation, social contingency not biological traceability, and political commitments not genetics.

It is unsurprising that Jonathan Freedman likewise describes Queer Diasporism (discussed in Chapter 5 as analogous to Queer Yiddishkeit) as a model of cultural production and reproduction that is not only “anti-normative,” but also “anti-genetic.”⁴⁵⁰ This sort of diaspora arises through connection, community, and kinship forged through consent rather than descent (the latter figured as biology and genetics). These articulations of “non-genetic” diaspora resonate with those outlined by Boyarin and Boyarin, Gilroy, and Edwards, which I also adopt as a framework. And yet, I propose that genetics might be incorporated into the same project of re-imagining the forms and possibilities of diaspora through poetic acts of affiliation.

⁴⁴⁸ Wald, “Future Perfect,” 692.

⁴⁴⁹ Eng, “Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas,” 5.

⁴⁵⁰ Freedman, *Klezmer America*, 93.

I use the term genetic diaspora here to describe a way of understanding the relations between bodies across time and space, aided by genetic knowledge. Such imaginations are indeed affiliative, even if they are at the same time circuited through knowledge of DNA. The anthropologist Noah Tamarkin, for instance, uses the term “genetic diaspora” to describe the networks of knowledge and feelings of relation between Lemba people in South Africa and Jews in North America and Israel, aided by discoveries of genetic similarities.⁴⁵¹ Those feelings of connection to in some ways rely on ostensibly definitive genetic maps of dispersion. However, the genetic diaspora Tamarkin describes is a matter of feeling, believing, remembering—even if genetic knowledge initiates these acts. Brent Hayes Edwards has argued that “diaspora” can serve as either an abstraction or as an “anti-abstraction.”⁴⁵² Genetic diaspora, too, can serve as both an abstraction and an anti-abstraction. The poetry of Adrienne Rich that I consider bellow was written decades before genetic ancestry technology would become a mass-market commodity. This work illustrates how genetic knowledge can be the grounds for imagining an affiliative, contingent, untraceable diaspora.

Adrienne Rich’s Dream of a Common Project

Scientific knowledge often looms large in discussions of Adrienne Rich, from a number of critical angles. Biographical records of Rich’s life tend to emphasize that her father was a physician and chair of pathology at Johns Hopkins medical school. Additionally, especially in recent years, feminist readers, scholars, and activists have attempted to sort out the legacy of Rich’s feminism and her stance on the biological body (especially the ability to know or

⁴⁵¹ Noah Tamarkin, “Genetic Diaspora: Producing Knowledge of Genes and Jews in Rural South Africa,” *Cultural Anthropology* 29, no. 3 (August 11, 2014): 552–74, <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca29.3.06>.

⁴⁵² Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Uses of Diaspora,” *Social Text* 19, no. 1 (2001): 64, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-19-1_66-45.

determine women's bodies medically). However, the relationship between biology and Jewishness in her work has not yet received sufficient scholarly attention. This is surprising, because science is a prominent source of inspiration in her writing. Perhaps most famously, in the poem "Power," which opens the collection *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978), Rich writes of reading about the scientist Marie Curie. Of Curie's innovative, and ultimately lethal, research into radiation, Rich writes that, "her wounds came from the same source as her power."⁴⁵³ For Rich, Curie represents the price women pay for being in the public sphere, for being engaged in discovery—whether scientific or poetic. By using Curie as a figure in this way, Rich gestures toward her belief in a common project of knowledge—fusing poetry, science, and politics—an aim that becomes a prominent theme in her writing.

In one essay, Rich writes admiringly of another intellectual foremother, the Jewish American poet Muriel Rukeyser, whom she describes as, "our twentieth-century Coleridge, our Neruda, and more," someone who "feels in her imagination the excitement of the lost connections between science and poetry."⁴⁵⁴ In another, Rich writes of her own dedication to resolving the bifurcation of poetry and science (or what C.P. Snow called "the two cultures"). She outlines a broad project of connecting science, literature, and politics in the essay "Woman and Bird,"

"The impulse to enter, with other humans, through language, into the order and disorder of the work, is poetic at its root as surely as it is political at its root. Poetry and politics both have to do with description and with power. And so, of course, does science. We might hope to find these activities—poetry, science, politics—triangulated, with extraordinary electrical exchanges moving from each to each through our lives. Instead, over centuries, they have been separated—poetry from politics, poetic naming from scientific naming, an ostensibly 'neutral' science from political questions, 'rational' science from lyrical poetry—nowhere more than in the United

⁴⁵³ Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 3.

⁴⁵⁴ Adrienne Rich, *What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1993), 96–97.

States over the past fifty years.”⁴⁵⁵

In this light, we are invited to read Rich’s work for moments that bind together the common project of “description and power” shared by poetry, politics, and science. The ecocritic Gioia Woods marshals Rich’s writing to suggest that scientific metaphor is not “simply the transformation of a scientific concept into poetic language; it’s the proposition that disparate discourses like science and beauty resemble one another, that they exist as kin, and that both blossom forth—move from thing to process—when they are mapped together as metaphor.”⁴⁵⁶ Scientific metaphors in Rich’s poetry present just such co-“blossoming,” or parallel naming.

In the 1982 cycle of poems, *Sources*, Rich describes how scientific knowledge of the world around her creates her poetic subject. Naming birds (and other flora and fauna) becomes an act of rootedness, an act of determining the aforementioned questions of “whom” and “where.” As a whole, *Sources* moves through questions of geography, inheritance, diaspora, and biology. In the cycle’s final poem, Rich describes reading the eighteenth-century English naturalist Gilbert White’s *Natural History of Selborne* (1789), which has been described by Tobias Menely as a “literary geography,” which in true Romantic form is a “retrospective idealization that transforms history into heritage.”⁴⁵⁷ White’s detailed, attentive descriptions of the history and geography of his parish found notable admirers in the likes of Charles Darwin,

⁴⁵⁵ Rich, 6–7.

⁴⁵⁶ Gioia Woods, “A Fairer House than Prose: Poetry, Science, and the Metaphors That Bind,” *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 10, no. 2 (2009): 14.

⁴⁵⁷ Tobias Menely, “Traveling in Place: Gilbert White’s Cosmopolitan Parochialism,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 28, no. 3 (2004): 47.

Samuel Coleridge, Virginia Woolf, and W.H. Auden.⁴⁵⁸ But Rich attests that, “I can never know this land I walk upon/as that English priest knew his.”⁴⁵⁹

Rich fills *Sources* with textured descriptions of nature in the eastern United States, but then, in the following lines of this final poem, Rich feigns to emulate the work of the natural scientist, identifying generic “rockledge soil insect bird weed tree,” without describing or naming them. She explains, while switching from first to second person, “I will never know those things because.../Because you have chosen/ something else: to know other things...Because you grew up in a castle of air/disjunctured.” Rich lacks the naturalistic knowledge (as in natural history) of the land, because she lacks a naturalized relationship to it— here she repeats a motif from the cycle, that she “grew up in a castle of air.” This lack of knowledge is an ambivalent lack, and a choice, as she *chose to know other things*. Rich is not like the aforementioned British authors who could read White’s *Natural History* and adopt a coherent history, heritage, and relationship to geography. She instead lays claim to an inheritance that is not rooted in specific geography. And in order to do so, she turns to genetic metaphor.

In *Sources*, Rich invokes the biological concept of genetic code and vertical relations of inheritance in order to chart her own diaspora. The poems are full of rhetorical questions that probe at Rich’s relationship to Jewish history, Zionism, the land of Israel, and the land of the United States. At one point, she proposes that, “Are there spirits in me, diaspora-driven/that wanted to lodge somewhere...”⁴⁶⁰ A later poem (mentioned in the introduction to this

⁴⁵⁸ Menely, 47.

⁴⁵⁹ Rich, *Sources*, 34.

⁴⁶⁰ Rich, 17.

dissertation) presents a version of such “diaspora-driven” spirits as “half-chances, unresolved” found “in the genetic code.”⁴⁶¹ Rich writes,

They say such things are stored
In the genetic code —

Half-chances, unresolved
Possibilities, the life

Passed on because unlived —
A mystic biology? —⁴⁶²

Stored in her genetic code are not her ancestors’ experiences, but their alternatives. These possibilities, “Passed on because unlived,” were attempted by other women—those who sailed from Europe to Palestine—but their hopes were also unfulfilled. The women at the center of this poem are drawn into Zionism’s promise of “equality in the promised land,” just as they’d been drawn to, and disappointed by, similar promises from communism and anarchism.⁴⁶³

In Rich’s poem, the genetic code houses unfulfilled, unlived possibilities, and through them, her body also contains diasporic, non-linear connections to Jewish women of the past. The poem closes with the suggestion of these women’s disappointment, that “Zion by itself is not enough” to realize the dream of social liberation—gender or otherwise.⁴⁶⁴ Rich is not merely pointing to the limits of Zionism, and thereby lauding diaspora by default. This poem’s genetic metaphor allows her to claim ties to multiple Jewish histories, multiple trajectories of geographic movement. This relation to history opposes the strict, linear positivism that many scholars

⁴⁶¹ Rich, 28.

⁴⁶² Rich, 28.

⁴⁶³ Rich, 28.

⁴⁶⁴ Rich, 29.

attribute to biology.⁴⁶⁵ In this poem, biology is not destiny, it is contingency. It is capacious multiplicity, recorded and stored in the body. In questioning, “a mystic biology?” the poem provides biology not as an answer, but a new set of names through which to ask the questions of “where?” and “whom?”.

Genetic metaphor provides a contrasting logic to how Rich writes about Jewish inheritance in some of her essays. She muses, in “Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity,” written just one year before *Sources*, that both Jewish religious and radical feminist patterns of lineage-making would seemingly discount her one male, Jewish parent. She writes, “My mother is a gentile. In Jewish law I cannot count myself a Jew. If it is true that ‘we think back through our mothers if we are women’ (Virginia Woolf)—and I myself have affirmed this—then even according to lesbian theory, I cannot (or need not?) count myself a Jew.”⁴⁶⁶ Thus, claiming ties to Jewish women through the figure of DNA is an act neither explicitly traditional nor explicitly radical; it cannot be folded into these two lineage-making practices through which she had previously understood herself. Genetic metaphor presents an alternative framework to claim these “half-chances” that reside unresolved within her, yet which would otherwise go unrecognized in Jewish religious or feminist frameworks.

While the language of genetics only appears midway through *Sources*, it emerges as a potential organizing metaphor for questions posed from the beginning of the cycle. The cycle’s second poem reads in full:

I refuse to become a seeker for cures.
Everything that has ever
helped me has come through what already
lay stored in me. Old things, diffuse, unnamed, lie strong

⁴⁶⁵ Weiman-Kelman, *Queer Expectations*, xxiv.

⁴⁶⁶ Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985* (New York: Norton, 1986), 476.

across my heart.

 This is from where
my strength comes, even when I miss my strength
even when it turns on me
like a violent master.⁴⁶⁷

The image of “Old things, diffuse, unnamed,” which “already/ lay stored in me” suggests DNA—an inheritance spread throughout the body. This phrase, “Old things” holds echoes of I.J. Singer’s term, “*yerushe-zakhn*” (“legacy things” or “inheritance things”); both phrases reveal a need for biological knowledge in order to describe an organic yet diffuse, felt yet unknown, legacy. Not unlike Singer’s description of an inheritance with its own agency over the individual, Rich’s image of the “old things” as a source of strength shifts at the end of the poem. The “old things” become separable from herself—something she can miss, something that can turn on her violently, something that can act as a master over her. Indeed, this inherited strength—which is old, which is already stored in her—has its own agency, alien to the poet.

The poem’s second half begins with the answer, “This is from where/my strength comes.” The statement preempts the question, “*from where?*” which is repeated five times in the following poem. There, the question encompasses geography and internal mapping—where in your body and where in the world? The poem indicates a location that is internal and diffuse on the one hand, and external and distant on the other. That poem begins;

From where? the voice asks coldly.

This is the voice in cold morning air
that pierces dreams. *From where does your strength come?*

Old things...

From where does your strength come, you Southern Jew?
split at the root, raised in a castle of air?

⁴⁶⁷ Rich, *Sources*, 10.

Yes. I expected this. I have known for years
The question was coming. *From where* ⁴⁶⁸

This poem repeats the titular metaphor of Rich's essay describing her Christian-Jewish heritage, "split at the root." That phrase and the question "*from where*" come not from the poetic speaker herself, but from an outside voice. That voice, by asking coldly, "*From where*," seems to ask the poet where *she* is from and assures her that she is not *from here*. For the poet, as a Southern Jew (seemingly an identity so specific to a place), the blinking question, "*from where*" implies that she is connected here and now to another place in another time. "*From where*" becomes a statement—a status—that encompasses both temporal and geographic otherness. The phrase, "*from where*," describes a diasporic subjectivity. This is why her "strength" comes not from those around her (those she calls Protestant "Jew-baiters," known to enact racial violence), but from "Old things," or "what already/ lay stored in me."

The diasporic status of "*from where*" questions her belonging in the concrete present, just as the image, "*raised in a castle of air*" does. Indeed, to be "*raised in a castle of air*" is, in a sense, to be raised inside of an idea: a location and imagined, present and diffuse. Recall, in the final poem of the collection, she states that being raised in a "castle of air" is the reason why she has "*chosen to know other things*." This is why she will never know the land she walks upon well enough, even as the second half of poem III enlists vivid (even Romantically bent) descriptions of nature: how green the mountains are, how the collapsed shed boards "gleam like pewter in the dew," and how the "realms of touch-me-not fiery with tiny tongues/ cover the wild

⁴⁶⁸ Rich, 11.

ground of the woods.”⁴⁶⁹ Instead, raised in a castle of air, she locates herself geographically in a diaspora.

This poetic conceptualization of diaspora is most cohesively articulated through Rich’s biological metaphor. I don’t wish to too narrowly define the poems’ ambiguous terms—after all, it matters a great deal that a poet who cares so deeply about names should call the “old things” within her, “diffuse, unnamed.” The genetic imagery in *Sources* is an answer proposed, though never definitively adopted (consider the tenuousness of the phrase, “they say such things are stored in the genetic code,” and the question mark after “a mystic biology?”). If she does not explicitly name those things “genes,” then why should I, her reader, do so forty years later?

To answer my own rhetorical question, the genetic symbolism proposed in the cycle fits into a rich thematic schema of diaspora. It helps to respond to the questions of “whom” and “where” that are both geographic and bodily in these poems. Furthermore, the diasporically inflected “genetic code” is able to forge a relationship between the bodily “*from where*” and the geographic “*from where*.” By projecting historical multiplicity rather than tracing a precise lineage, Rich develops distinct possibilities for the genetic construction of Jewish diaspora in American literature (and exhibits a distinctly genetic form of the biological imagination). Rich’s cycle serves as a paradigmatic and optimistic example of genetic diaspora in Jewish American culture.

A Brief Counterexample

If Rich presents a diasporic optimism through biology, a parallel diasporic pessimism is presented in one of the most prominent works of postwar Jewish American fiction: Philip Roth’s

⁴⁶⁹ Rich, 11.

Portnoy's Complaint (1967). (I ensure my readers that the comparison of Rich and Roth is intended to do more than shock their sensibilities.) In Roth's novel, diasporic consciousness and diasporic conflict are imagined through biological contagion, as well as through biological inheritance.⁴⁷⁰ When the protagonist, Alexander Portnoy travels to Israel at the end of the novel, he meets an Israeli woman, Naomi, who appraises him as the abject culmination of generations of Jewish diaspora, and he registers that, "By dawn I had been made to see that I was the epitome of what was most shameful about 'the culture of the diaspora.' Those centuries and centuries of homelessness had produced just such disagreeable men as myself..."⁴⁷¹ Portnoy tries to force himself on Naomi, but is met with his own impotence (sexually and, by metaphor, Jewish-historically). In the midst of their physical struggle, Portnoy frames his violent act of sexual coercion through a fantasy of biological contagion. He bitterly imagines that he will transmit a venereal disease to her, so that he can show her, "This is what it's like in the diaspora...this is what it's like in the exile!"⁴⁷² He invokes tropes of ghetto degeneracy and disease—the very sort of pathologized Jewish inheritance invoked in prewar texts cited throughout this dissertation. He turns sour the Boyarins' idealistic model of diaspora as chaotic (yet, ultimately chaotic *and* good) horizontal contagion.

Roth's protagonist specifically associates Jewish pathology with the diasporic condition (in opposition to the condition of Jews in Israel). This scene reflects the Zionist notion that by

⁴⁷⁰ The contrast between these two forms of transmission has been described by Wald, "Contagious and infectious epidemics underscore the contact unrelated people, often strangers, have with each other; they are very much located in the present, emphasizing the rupture with the past and the uncertainty of the future. Genetics, by contrast, focuses on biological kinship relations in which the past and the future loom as large as the present." Wald, "Future Perfect," 685.

⁴⁷¹ The binary of diaspora-Israel is further explored in Roth's novel, *Operation Shylock*, which provides a meta-commentary on his previous work's relationship to Diasporism. Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint* (New York: Random House, 1969), 265.

⁴⁷² Roth, 266.

moving to Israel and working the land, Jews like Naomi's parents had somehow rid their bodies of any trace of Jewish history—that they could re-make and un-make the (perhaps pathological) Jewish diasporic body. It is this very project that Portnoy invokes as he makes an attempt at “contaminating the pride and future of Zion” with his own “centuries and centuries of homelessness.”⁴⁷³ In this way, Roth, too uses biological knowledge to conceive of the connections and differences between individual Jewish bodies, according to their historical and geographical positions. Portnoy continues to think of Naomi as “blood of my blood” as he wills her to have sex with him, yet he promises, “I am about to poison your organs of reproduction! I am about to change the future of the race!”⁴⁷⁴ For Portnoy, the horizontal, geographical contagion between the diaspora Jew and the Israeli Jew was an attempt to change the “future of the race,” by way of marking her body with a diasporic history that he had inherited but she had supposedly heretofore evaded. The character is attempting to infuse multiple Jewish histories into the woman's body, not as an act of optimism, but as an act of ironic revenge.

The brief comparison between Rich and Roth shows not only the difference between a feminist and a misogynist, or poetry and prose, but also the difference between an author who envisions Jewish diaspora optimistically and one who views it with ironic pessimism. Rich's musings on half-chances residing in the genetic code stand in stark contrast to Roth's allegory of coercive transmission of inherited history. Indeed, the extent to which they present differing perspectives on diaspora makes it hard to reconcile the fact that they both use biological metaphor to write the multiplicity and contingency of Jewish history into the body. Indeed, Roth's narrative conveys that there is nothing inherently non-coercive about diaspora—nor about

⁴⁷³ Roth, 268, 265.

⁴⁷⁴ Roth, 268.

its attendant version of history as contingent and multiple. Biology need not be mystic and it need not be laced with optimism. The last forty-some-odd years have not necessarily proven the poetry of Rich wrong; nor have they proven Roth wrong, either.

Genetic Metaphor and Text

Rich's poetry is evidence that DNA has introduced a significant set of motifs and metaphors to contemporary culture. The central metaphors of genetics, enumerated by literary scholar Patricia E. Chu, include, "information, code, reading, text, linguistics, cloning, editing."⁴⁷⁵ They have come to saturate popular imagination of bodily inheritance and determine the mode through which we interpret genetic information. In the genetic age, it seems that we all imagine that our bodies, in each and every cell, hold a text in which our pasts and futures are written out. This emphasis on writing is of special interest to those in the field of literature and science. As Wald has noted, besides the metaphor of the text, the other most common metaphor applied to genes is the map; she contends that these two metaphors "represent two different and competing relationships to their material," with the *text* suggesting interpretive mutability and the *map* suggesting relative certitude.⁴⁷⁶ Wald continues to argue that public-facing writings of geneticists "register a constant tension between the desire to establish meaning (create a definitive map, find the *right* reading) and the recognition and even celebration of its proliferation: the poetry of the gene."⁴⁷⁷ As at-home genetic ancestry tests (and the animation described in this chapter's opening) suggest, the map may be the dominant image through which we receive and interpret genetic information nowadays. The map also seems an obvious image

⁴⁷⁵ Chu, "The American Genome Project," 212.

⁴⁷⁶ Wald, "Future Perfect," 681.

⁴⁷⁷ Wald, 682.

for understanding genetic *diaspora* (as in, geographic dispersal and movement). Yet Rich's work suggests that the "poetry of the gene"—which is to say, the proliferation of meaning and of past possibilities that still wait to be fulfilled—might be a more satisfying way to conceive of genetic diaspora.

Coda

These have been strange years to write a dissertation about the past and present of American immigration, race, literature, and science's role in how people think about these hefty topics. The longer I delved into the past, the more the present began to echo what I had perhaps once smugly regarded as distant mistakes, misguided beliefs, or intellectual trends that the contemporary thinker could summarily disregard. I could not have imagined at the outset that I would finish this dissertation amid the seismic turmoil and grief of the Covid-19 pandemic. "Biology" seems to be all around us, and we have been made acutely aware of science and culture's entanglement. On the face of it, what we're all so concerned about is not the kind of biological thinking that I've studied. It's all contagion, never inheritance. But then I think about the past year's spike in virus-inspired hate crimes, or the rush to pathologize (rather than contextualize) disparate death rates among racial and ethnic groups. Again, I think of how it all continues, and all connects. Inheritance and contagion may be different models, but they are not separable, especially when we recognize that we are also transmitting stories about our bodies and others'.

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